UNDER THE ROSE

BY ANATOLE FRANCE

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Edited by Michel Corday and translated by J. Lewis May

A series of dialogues in which Anatole France presents in dramatic narrative his ideas, intimate and *sub-rosa,* on God, Nature, Metaphysics, War, Modesty, The Church, Old Age, and similar topics. Several well-developed characters appear in the various chapters, lending a sense of continuity to the group and adding the color of their individual personalities. Among these personages are the Baron, who was fond of servant girls, Old Ebener, Madame Paillet, Floris (Anatole France himself), Doctor Constant, and some comedians. In all of the Dialogues the many-sided genius of the author is reflected and his brilliant and clever conversation is apparent. These *sub-rosa* discussions of some of the matters nearest France's heart are his final legacy to the world—in them are combined shrewd wisdom and child-like simplicity, both of which were so characteristic of the author.

6·1·71

THE WORKS OF ANATOLE FRANCE
IN AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION
EDITED BY THE LATE FREDERIC
CHAPMAN AND JAMES LEWIS MAY

UNDER THE ROSE

"Sub Rosa"

The Amethyst Ring
The Aspirations of Jean Servien
At the Sign of the Reine Pédauque
Balthasar
The Bloom of Life
The Bride of Corinth, and Other Poems and Plays
Clio and the Chateaux de Vaux le Vicomte
Conversations with Anatole France
Crainquebille
The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard
The Elm Tree on the Mall
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The Red Lily
The Revolt of the Angels
The Seven Wives of Bluebeard
Thaïs
Under the Rose
The Well of St. Clare
The White Stone
The Wicker-Work Woman

UNDER THE ROSE

BY ANATOLE FRANCE

ARRANGED AND ANNOTATED BY
MICHEL CORDAY
AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION BY
J. LEWIS MAY

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TO THE READER

FEEL that some apology is due from me for encumbering with so much matter of my own, the pages—alas, too few!—written by Anatole France during the closing years of his life, and hitherto left unpublished.

Yet all who take delight in his works and revere his memory will, I am sure, understand the twofold sentiment by which I have been animated.

In the first place, it was my aim to show, in the light of the unfinished work he has left behind him, how conscientiously he laboured up to the very end of his life, how scrupulously he consulted his authorities, how abundantly he read, and how carefully he composed, often drafting and re-drafting the outline of his work as many as eight times. To the particulars relating to the

last finished pages he has bequeathed to us, I have added a few notes concerning work planned by him but never brought to completion, work of which a rapid sketch is all that remains to us, or a sentence jotted down on a scrap of paper, often merely something that had struck him in the course of conversation.

But I had another purpose also. A year has gone by since he was laid in the grave. The silence imposed upon us by a sense of what was befitting at such a time may now be broken, and I intend to record my protest against the ignoble tittle-tattle of certain gossip-mongers, against the baseless calumnies of his detractors.

MICHEL CORDAY

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UNDER THE ROSE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

HE greater part of the unpublished remains of Anatole France consists of Dialogues which he intended to entitle *Under the Rose.*

He liked that old-fashioned expression. In the course of an essay on the Emperor Julian in *Life and Letters*, he says:

"One evening I heard Monsieur Renan say *under the rose*, 'Julian! Why, the man was a reactionary.' "

But nowadays the phrase is seldom used, and its real significance is almost forgotten. The big dictionaries of the day know it not.

You may find a definition of it in the *Dictionary of the Abbé Trévoux*, which was published in the eighteenth century, and of

which there is a copy at La Béchellerie. This is how it runs:

"The Fabulists, whether ancient or modern, state that Harpocrates, the god of Love, made a present to the god of Silence of a beautiful rose, at a time when none had as yet beheld that flower and when it was quite new and unknown, in order that he should reveal no hint of the secret practices and conversations of Venus his mother. Whence it became customary to suspend a rose within the chambers where friends and kinsfolk were holding festival, so that they could speak freely whatever they listed, being assured by the presence of the said rose, that no whisper of their discourse would get abroad. Therefore it is said that the rose is the symbol of Silence, and that we are *sub rosa* when we are in a place of safety where we have no reason to fear the presence of eavesdroppers or tale-bearers."

The dictionary of the early-French language confirms this definition. "The Rose," it says, "is the emblem of secrecy and

discretion," adding that, in the Middle Ages, ladies who had practised discretion in their lifetime were represented on their tombstones bearing a rose in their hand.

"To speak under the rose" is a delicate variant of the phrase "parler sous le manteau de la cheminée," to speak under the mantelpiece.

Originally Anatole France had contemplated another title. In the margin of one of his rough drafts of the Dialogues occurs this note: "Perhaps, for a title, *Under the Olive*."

He had, as a matter of fact, begun to write these Dialogues just after the war, and he had, no doubt, been prompted to enroll them beneath the emblem of Peace. The reader will observe in due course how one of his characters alludes to this auspicious date. "Let us celebrate together," so the words run, "in these days of peace and repose, here beneath the sacred olive, the serene orgies of metaphysics. Let us drink our fill of wisdom."

It was a year earlier, that is to say in the autumn of 1917, that he conceived the plan of the first Dialogue.

Filled with consternation at the prolongation of the war, he used to say:

"I should like to write a dialogue concerning God, in which I should develop the following idea: 'If God exists, He must be the most abominable of creatures, since He has permitted this war to be.' "

Such, then, was the origin of *Under the Rose.*

He had a liking for the Dialogue form. There are Dialogues in *The Garden of Epicurus*, *Pierre Nozière*, *My Friend's Book*, and *Life and Letters.* A note discovered in the "Dialogue portfolio," one of the countless notes he jotted down on any scrap of paper that came to his hand—the back of a letter, or a bill, the cover of a catalogue—throws a light on this predilection.

"Montaigne had no need to write dialogues in order to present the different facets

of a question. He himself was equal to that manifold task, so many-sided was he, so diverse, so fertile in antitheses. But I —I am not several people rolled into one, and I have need of your contradictions."

No sooner had he conceived the idea of a Dialogue on the Existence of God than he resolved to extend his plan and to treat similarly of other matters. Towards the end of the war he sorted out the memoranda and documents he had gathered together up to that point. The papers relating to each subject were put into their own special cases, made out of newspapers neatly folded in the manner one employs when covering a book.

These papers, already yellowing with age, are all dated October 1918. In big, black type the routine phraseology of the military dispatch catches the eye: "We have made some further progress. Two attempted surprise-attacks by the enemy were successfully repulsed."

On each of these covers is gummed a

ticket on which the nature of its contents is indicated in that handwriting whose firmness and simple elegance were a delight to behold, e. g. *God*, *Nature*, *Metaphysics*, *War*, *The Future*, *Language as a means of attaining Truth*, *Shame*, *The Church*, and so on.

Anatole France was obliged to set aside these papers in order to devote his attention to *The Bloom of Life*. When that work was finished he returned to *Under the Rose*. To the plan already formulated, he added a Dialogue on *Old Age*, for which he had got together the material, and a Dialogue on *Astronomy*, for which he was collecting notes up to the day he took to his bed. That was his final task.

It was his intention to write two further Dialogues, one on *Love*, the other on *Death*.

CHAPTER II

A DIALOGUE ON METAPHYSICS AND THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

RIGINALLY the subjects of Metaphysics and the Existence of God were each treated in a separate Dialogue. The majority of the rough drafts and successive sketches show that this was the case. Moreover, we have seen that in arranging and classifying his papers in 1918, the Master set aside a separate file for each of these two subjects.

Originally, too, the persons of the two Dialogues were comparatively numerous, exceeding half a dozen. (When the subject of a discussion is a more or less widespread belief, a dialogue need not be limited to two persons, but may legitimately introduce several interlocutors.)

However, in the last version, the two Dia-

logues were blended together, or, to put it more accurately, were welded one to the other. And the characters were again reduced to two.

It will be apparent, if we compare the Dialogue in its ultimate shape with the tentative sketches which preceded it, that it has been rigorously pruned. How rigorously will be seen by the number and importance of the discarded passages which will be found appended to the Dialogue.

The following is the text of the manuscript in its final form.

THÉMINE

Will this world, into which we are cast in a state of tragic ignorance as to what it is and what we are, always remain beyond our ken, seeing that our senses, whose testimony is governed by our reason, bring us into touch with external objects?

FLORIS

Alas, this physical machine which puts us

in touch with things that encompass us, is a clumsy machine which bumps blindly against the things it encounters, but never penetrates beneath their surface. All things are proof against its impact. It comes to a halt at the surface, and the substance, however finely it may be sublimated, always remains hidden from us. As for our reason, it is a vague, indefinite, uncertain, confused and changeful thing. It varies, even in the same individual, from year to year, from day to day, from hour to hour. It flares up and dies down with equal suddenness and does but produce perplexity and countless contradictory notions. The lower animals are endowed with an apparatus, not greatly dissimilar from that of man, for taking cognizance of the external world. They are also furnished with reasoning faculties, far less extensive than ours, but similar in kind. Thus, a dog and a man, to all intents and purposes, entertain, broadly speaking, the same idea of nature. Poor Mitzi, lying there with his

nose between his paws and turning his beautiful gold-brown eyes upon me, knows as much—and as little—as his master about life and the world.

THÉMINE

But does there not exist, Floris, a mode of ratiocination which is the exclusive prerogative of philosophers? Is there not such a thing as pure reason, which perceives things that elude the ordinary reason? And may it not be possible, by its aid, to attain the knowledge to which I aspire?

FLORIS

Such is indeed the notion of those who profess Metaphysic, or as we should more properly say Metaphysics. For such is the true name of the ancient pastime to which the Greeks gave a new lease of life—Metaphysics, or the things which come after Physics. Thus did the editors of Aristotle ordain. So far as I am able to understand

the matter, metaphysicians, in order to guard against the errors of the senses and universal illusion, create a counter-illusion. With our rough-and-ready mental apparatus, we imagine that we see, hear and feel; they, on the other hand, imagine that they neither see nor hear nor feel at all, and pride themselves, in consequence, on having made sensible progress towards a solution of the mysteries of nature.

THÉMINE

Have not these metaphysical speculations, at which, Floris, you jest a little flippantly, become, in modern philosophy, the science of origins, and consequently the highest of the sciences, as my Master, Monsieur Bulle, has it; the science whence all other sciences derive their certitude and their unity?

FLORIS

Ah, but that is where our difficulties begin. We did not come into the world soon

enough, Thémine, to know the beginnings of things. We are precisely an eternity too late to grasp the one universal principle (*principem primus capere*, the etymologists have it). Unlike Petit Jean, what we know least about, is our beginning. We are as remote from the beginning of things as those husbandmen were distant from the sea shore when they mistook for a flail the oar which the wandering Ulysses bore upon his shoulder. And when Monsieur Bulle adds that the science in question is an exalted one, he is not a metaphysician, but a quack and one of the most ignorant at that. For in the universe there is no such thing as "high" or "low."

THÉMINE

Let us leave off talking about beginnings, please. Let us rather reason about the verities that are within our reach. And in order to reduce to a minimum the errors to which our senses and our reason are prone, we will aim at a rigid accuracy of language

and be careful to define the precise connotation of our terms, as and when we bring them into our discussion.

FLORIS

And how, pray, are we to define them? By words; words which we must needs define by other words, themselves subject to definition in the same manner. And what is a word? Just a sound, a murmur, a cry, a grunt (*muttum*). The philosophers have been at great pains to differentiate the speech of man from the inarticulate language of animals. No doubt there is a great difference between the two, but it is not complete and fundamental, it is not a difference in kind. In either case it is just murmuring, grunting, *muttire*. And if there is a wide difference between the harmonious lamentations of Antigone mourning for the blessed light of day, and the howling of a beaten dog, it is, in either case, but a stream of sounds outpoured by the suffering flesh. Let us agree that we are en-

dowed with speech as animals are. Do you aspire to reveal the secrets of the universe by means of those little words which enable both men and animals to express joy and pain, desire and fear, to cry aloud their hunger, to threaten a foe, to entreat a loved one and to thrill all the airs of heaven with the tumult of their emotions? What a fantastic notion!

Doubtless we attach a meaning to the words we employ; but only to those which denote a definite, tangible object, and are attached to it like a label, as it were. Words whereby we imagine we represent something that cannot be pictured, have no significance whatever. They have nothing to attach themselves to, they float in the void. However we may attempt to define them, they will remain for ever undefined. The words by which a metaphysician imagines he is labelling his abstractions did not exist in the beginning of language, or if exist they did, they connoted some definite object from which they have since become

detached. For example, the spirit, *l'esprit*, *spiritus* meant "a breath"; *l'âme*, the soul, meant "breathing," "respiration." And when people say that animals have no soul, it is exactly as if one were to say that beings which breathe have no breath. In metaphysics they speak, I don't remember in what connection, of pure mind, pure spirit. Of what can we predicate purity in a world where all things are intermingled and combined? The word "pure" signifies, originally, something that is washed. It becomes meaningless if it is employed to qualify a spirit, a breath.

Frequently, in order to designate the factors of his shadowy, impalpable speculations, your metaphysician uses words which he has deprived of all their potency by adding to them an emasculating prefix. I mean such words as "immateriality," "infinite," "indefinite," "indeterminate," "absolute," which, strictly speaking, are not words at all, but the negation of words. Has he any alternative? Where he is wrong is in trying

to express an imaginary world by means of attenuated modulations of the cries of fear and love which resounded amid the silence of forgotten forests long, long before the advent of the first man.

Thémine, I will impart to you a weighty truth. Man is in no better case than the poor animals, his brothers, when it comes to learning anything about things and their causes. However wide the range of his researches, however ingenious the contrivances he may invent to supplement the infirmity of his senses, he will never do more than multiply the fields of his ignorance. Imprisoned within his own being, everything which he may believe to be external to himself will mislead him, and by whatsoever means he thinks to grasp them, he will, in the long run, only find—himself! Now, devote yourself, if you have a mind, to researches in experimental philosophy, or fling yourself into the abysmal depths of metaphysics, you will never discover therein aught save yourself!

THÉMINE

You know, Floris, that human speech, whose genesis you ascribe to the cries of animals, had, in the eyes of M. Renan, a wholly different and mysterious origin. Far more important still, it was regarded by a philosopher of the nineteenth century as the fountain of truth. It is, according to M. de Bonald, incapable of expressing aught but truth, and if, by chance, error does creep in, that is because it insinuates itself into the spaces between the words, so to speak, and is due to their defective co-ordination. According to Bonald, in fact, human speech affords the most convincing proof of the existence of God.

FLORIS

Let them say what they will. It will never be anything but *muttire*, grunting. It is, of course, open to you to prefer M. de Bonald's grunting to mine, if you want to.

THÉMINE

Seeing that you are so kind, Floris, I shall avail myself of your permission; for *your* grunting gives me no chance to reason correctly. Nevertheless since, though you are quite convinced that you can do nothing but grunt, you grunt with skill and in accordance with the laws of reason, let us rejoice together, you and I, in these days of peace and repose; let us celebrate beneath the sacred olive the serene, untroubled orgies of metaphysics, let us drink our fill of wisdom. Let us together seek out the causes of things and, if you will, let us first of all meditate upon the *causa causans*, the primal cause of all. Floris, do you believe in the existence of God?

FLORIS

Thémine, your question seems a simple one. In reality it is by no means so. Existence is not a single and constant state. There are several ways of existing. A mountain, a valley exist. A palace, a hovel

exist. A tree, a man, a lion exist. A right-angled triangle exist, with all its properties. Time and Space exist, and it were contrary to reason to deny it. Passions, sensations, ideas exist. But these various existences are not of the same nature. Our notion of the existence of God will vary with the nature of the truths adduced to support it. When, for example, we infer it from the necessity of a *primum mobile*, it certainly does not seem the same as if we conceived of it as an idea of justice, which demands to be realized. In the former case it will be physical, mechanical and dynamic; in the latter it will be moral. The argument based on universal consent, merely tends to locate it in the consciousness of a great number of human beings, without assigning it any reality apart from them. If it realizes the idea of infinity which we are said to possess (but which I am very doubtful about) it is itself infinite, and therefore measureless, limitless, indeterminate, featureless—in a word, the same as if it was not. On the other

hand, if we conceive of it as the existence of the Creator of the Universe, it is limited, fettered, finite, for it would be impossible that God should not be confined somewhere within His creation provided it had any consistence. So you see, His existences are of wonderful diversity.

THÉMINE

Nevertheless, He has been made the subject of definition, though the term, as applied to Him, has a strange sound, and partakes slightly of that grunting of which you were speaking just now.

FLORIS

The philosophers call Him the Infinite One. In so doing they do not define Him; they "undefine" Him. To affirm Him thus is, in reality, to deny Him. Everything predicated of Him is contradictory. He is described as being unbounded in space and time, and then He is contracted to the

measure of mortal man. He is invested with omnipotence, and then displayed as baulked at every turn by a maleficent, unreasoning adversary, drunk with hatred and rage. The notion of God as the Creator of the World, a notion formed in the childhood of the race, no longer corresponds with our views concerning the constitution of matter, the plurality of worlds, the mechanism of the heavens and the results of knowledge in general. His universal creation has shrunk to an infinitesimal point in the universe, and the Earth is but a speck of dust amid the multitude of worlds which, it was alleged, were created to be subservient to it. They invest Him with the physique of a child and the moral code of a savage. I say nothing of what the theologians have made of Him.

THÉMINE

Nevertheless, successive generations retain their faith in Him.

FLORIS

Yes, successive generations retain their faith in Him, and the reason for that is abundantly clear. The worthy Kant, who was given to meditation, discovered the principles of human knowledge and the reconciliation of the various conflicting philosophic systems, in the smoke that curled up from his porcelain pipe; but he did not find God there. Having, with great assiduity, searched for Him in vain, he had made up his mind to do without Him, when, taking a walk one day through the streets of Königsberg, that rich and populous city, he observed many scenes of disorder and sedition. Amid this tumult, at which the mind of the sage revolted in disgust, God suddenly appeared to him, and the good philosopher immediately entrusted Him with the task of policing the world. That, in popular parlance, is what we mean when we say, in philosophical terminology, that

Kant's belief in God does not result from theoretic, but from practical, reasoning.

Thus, mighty intellect as he was, the Sage of Königsberg fell back on the common belief of mankind who, in their thirst for happiness and life, cling to an Omnipotent Being at once just and merciful, to whom they look for eternal happiness and the punishment of their enemies. Such, then, is the fundamental basis of the belief in God. It rests upon self-interest, like morality and all the rest of mankind's most sacred beliefs. Man does not believe in things as they are, but in things as he wishes them to be.

THÉMINE

A belief that, in the long run, may prove not unproductive. Who knows whether, as our Master, Renan, used to say, we may not bring a just God into being, merely by believing in Him?

CHAPTER III

THE SUPPRESSED CHARACTERS

NATOLE FRANCE had drawn up this little annotated list of the characters in his Dialogues:

"The Baron Onarion de Ténar.

"He is fond of servant girls.

"Old Ebener.

"Madame Paillet, commonly called Rodogune.

"Floris (A. F.)

"Thémine.

"There will be some comedians, among them, la petite Paillet.

"Doctor Constant.

"Rodogune's son is religious."

A series of erasures indicate that the Baron Onarion de Ténar has had to answer successively to the names of de la Taraudière, Rodônias, Rodonie, Podoria, Rodopide.

Another obliteration indicates that Floris was first called Jacques Salvage.

The initials A. F., in brackets, after the name Floris, indicate that the interlocutor in question will express the opinions of Anatole France himself.

We also read on the page on which this note is given, the following:

"I have found my Platonist in the person of the man who fancies he has been an ass. He will set forth his philosophy by reading the story of his experiences, which is adapted from the Golden Ass of Apuleius."

It is a fact that the story of the metamorphosis of a man into an ass attracted others beside Apuleius, Lucius de Patras and Lucian, whose names are associated with the famous legend of the Golden Ass. In a separate note, Anatole France makes mention of an Italian writer who availed himself of the story in the sixteenth century.

"Agnolo Firenzuola, of Florence (1493–1545), who, to the stories of old Lucius,

added (or substituted) several adventures of his own."

The imitator of Apuleius thus begins his confessions:

"Many writers have recounted the manner in which Lucius was changed into an Ass. I know not whether they were tempted by the wisdom that lies hidden within the story or whether they were moved solely by a desire to divert the public."

"As for myself, I have the most excellent reason for relating it, which is that the very same thing happened to me. I am as sure of it as one can be of anything of this kind, and the longer I ponder the matter the more clearly do the circumstances of the adventure present themselves to my mind."

"I shall, therefore, give thereof the most accurate version, which, unhappily, may not be the most agreeable to the reader. It approximates in parts to the narratives of Lucius and Apuleius, and I have been at no pains to avoid following those authors in such places. On the other hand, it some-

times differs from them very widely in certain matters of high importance, and I have not hesitated to contradict those admirable story-tellers, whom, however, I could not suffer myself to take wholly as my models, inasmuch as,—I say it again,—it is my own adventure that I am relating."

"Moreover, what else could I do? Could I have ignored my own recollections, which lived on in my mind with a freshness and a brilliance that time has not availed to diminish?"

There the quotation stops short. The Platonist was suppressed, as also were the Baron Onarion de Ténar, Madame Paillet, old Ebener and Doctor Constant. Thémine and Floris were the sole survivors.

Concerning the characters who thus vanish from our ken we have only a note or two jotted down here and there. On Madame Paillet, commonly called Rodogune, a tragédienne, there are just these few words in the margin of one of the pages:

"The tragédienne: she is cynical and religious."

We know that the Baron de Ténar had "ancillary" predilections, as indicated on the list of characters. Moreover, one of his companions said of him: "He is a very learned man. They say he was two years without hearing any mention of the war."

The portrait of old Ébener is a little more clearly sketched in. Some one said, as they saw him walking along in the wake of a strumpet:

"Don't say anything. He is eternal, he is! He is The Satyr—He is Baron Hulot —He is La Bosse. He is wise. He braves public opinion. What he asks of a woman is not love, or the propagation of life with all its sorrows. That, if he thought about it, would rather daunt him. He asks of her just what she is capable of giving. Oh, how wise are they at whom the people mock and whom the harlots themselves despise."

The disappearance of these persons naturally involved that of several passages

which figure in the successive revisions of the Dialogue.

Thus Madame Paillet, commonly called Rodogune, was given to playing bridge. The circumstance occasioned an exchange of repartee between the Baron de Ténar and Floris. Said Ténar:

"It is difficult to give a satisfactory definition of so vast a science as metaphysics. Let us content ourselves, for the moment, with saying that it considers things in their essence, independently of all particular properties and accidental qualities."

Whereto Floris made answer:

"According to your definition, Ténar, Madame Paillet is a great metaphysician. For she spends half her days playing bridge and considers the cards in their pure essence independently of any physical or chemical property. What is there more metaphysical than a playing-card?"

Another passage insisted on the metaphysical character of such games.

"It is round a card-table that metaphysics

reign supreme. It is there that its sternest ministers are installed. It is there that we consider the essence of things independently of the special properties and accidental qualities which establish a difference between one object and another. It is there that pure reason exacts its tribute of obedience.

"Cards and dominoes are the most perfect instruments, the purest symbols, of metaphysics. What could be more metaphysical than the ace, or the six?

"And it is to-day, when bridge is making us forget the war, that you decry metaphysics!"

Another piece of dialogue disappeared with Madame Paillet. The tragédienne was summoning up the memories of her past.

MADAME PAILLET

That time I succumbed, I really don't know why. He had neither good looks nor good nature to recommend him. Perhaps it was because he belonged to our set, because he was an artist. He was a theatre-ticket

agent; but he was so untempting that it must have been the Devil who tempted me.

FLORIS

The Devil or God?

MADAME PAILLET

God, tempt a poor wretched woman? What an idea! God is no tempter.

FLORIS

If He is not, why do you say to Him, "And lead us not into temptation"? That is the prayer you address to God. What difference would you make if you were praying to the Devil?

CHAPTER IV

FURTHER OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING METAPHYSICS

UMEROUS fragments were discarded in the final version, apart from the conversations assigned to the suppressed characters. Nor are these fragments just ideas jotted down at haphazard. Often they are passages of which as many as three or four successive preliminary drafts are extant.

It is impossible to state with accuracy which of these passages were deliberately excised in the process of meticulous revision, which were omitted from some fortuitous motive, and which were deliberately set aside for use in another Dialogue. We shall therefore give the greater number of them, commencing with those that have to do with Metaphysics.

At quite an early stage, Anatole France had investigated with considerable pains the origin of the word "Metaphysics." In one of those documentary memoranda which he liked to gather about him, and of which several examples are given later on in this book, he recalled that Aristotle's treatise on Metaphysics owed its name to the fact that it came *after* his treatise on Physics.

"An expression taken from Aristotle, who, coming to his treatise on Metaphysics, which is placed after his treatise on Physics, begins it with the words: 'After natural things' (Physics)."

In the Dialogue itself, Floris indicated the vicissitudes which the work in question had undergone:

"A fine book, but between ourselves it has come down to us more man-handled than a lettuce dressed for the table. It has no beginning, no conclusion and no middle. This is not much to be wondered at, seeing that it deals with Metaphysics. If it were about the wrath of Achilles or the wander-

ings of Ulysses, anyone would see at a glance that it is all a hotch-potch."

Floris also defined the difference between Physics and Metaphysics.

"The name doesn't enlighten us as to the nature of the dish, nor does it explain in what Metaphysics differs from Physics. I must have recourse to a parable to make you understand it. Ask a housewife to tell you what a *purée* is. She will tell you that there are *purées* and *purées*. There is the thick *purée*, in which a spoon will stand upright. Well, that is Nature, Physics. Then there is the *purée* that has been strained through a sieve—thin, slushy stuff and as clear as water. That is Metaphysics. Metaphysics differs from Physics in that the best part of it has been left behind in the strainer."

Then Thémine rebukes Floris for twitting Metaphysics about its name.

"Floris, you are insulting, outrageous, flippant. You chaff Metaphysics about its name. Do we judge people by their

names? What does it matter to you whether you are called Jacques or Pierre? Is geometry a very exact name for a science that measures not only the Earth but the Universe and deals with the properties of figures? None the less it is an exact science."

(The passage concerning the small importance of names is one of those of which we have four different versions, each with some slight variation.)

Then Thémine, still maintaining his indignant attitude, proceeds to enunciate an apology for Metaphysics.

"The faculty of considering things apart from such and such special attributes belongs to all men. It is a necessary faculty. I will exhibit it to you alike in the greatest geniuses and in minds of quite ordinary calibre."

And farther on:

"The operations which belong to Metaphysics and which you regard as imaginary, are in such close conformity with human na-

ture that there is not a single goodwife who does not practise Metaphysics every morning when she goes to market. She considers chicken, eggs, fish, vegetables in their essence, and she doesn't worry about particularities which don't assist her to get her commodities at a reasonable figure."

Floris jestingly approved, and gave his ironical support to the thesis of his interlocutor. According to him the goodwife had other opportunities of indulging in Metaphysics when shopping.

"She says 'Life is hard—one hardly knows how to get along.' She freely indulges in abstractions. She generalizes. When she says 'I have lost my cat,' she is in the domain of Physics. But when she adds: 'The cat is an ungrateful animal,' she no longer beholds a real cat, but the ideal cat (and the only real one, for you must understand, the ideal is the sole reality). In a word, she emancipates herself from everything of a contingent nature, she soars in mid-air, she speeds on daring pin-

ions towards the untroubled regions of Metaphysics."

"Metaphysics," he went on, "is, rightly understood, so necessary to life that I doubt if even the lower animals do not practise it, in their inmost being. It is at least a fact that they must play the metaphysician concerning their food and drink and form both a general and specific conception of their nutriment, for if they only looked on it physically they would never know where they were."

Floris also lays it down that metaphysical philosophy is so clear and simple that he could make the little dog Mitzi understand it.

"Listen to me, Mitzi. Open the portals of your understanding, lift up your heart and learn on what condition you may become worthy the attention of the metaphysicians. Cast aside, fling away, everything which makes you Mitzi, everything which endears you to your mistress, everything which makes you pleasing to your friends,

redoubtable to strange dogs and attractive to Mirza. Become indistinct, merge yourself in all other dogs, be Mitzi no longer, become like Racine's Hippolytus, without shape and without colour, and the Sage, Kant, will deposit you in his intellectual Treasury. But so long as you have a tooth left, or so much as a nail, a single hair, you will be unworthy of the contemplation of the metaphysicians."

Thémine became still more reproachful.

"What pleasure do you find, Floris, in humiliating man by laughing at things which he deems grave, and by revealing the shallowness of things which he deems profound? People will shun you, in their indignation, whereas you have only to rehandle your propositions and to translate them into fine language to become a highly respected philosopher and a popular moralist. You are throwing away a great chance. Keep your acid tongue under control. I want to know, I say, what I am, whence I come, and whither I am going.

Floris explained his splenetic outburst:

"Play the metaphysician like your housewife and like Mitzi, and even a little more —well and good. I can stand that. But don't carry it too far. That's what gets on my nerves."

He protested that he was as much of a philosopher as anyone, and that he too, when he wanted, could pass from the intelligible to the unintelligible, and cease to be comprehensible.

Then, at last, he resigned himself to his fate.

"Let us play the metaphysician, then, since we can't always stick to Physics. But it's a pity."

In the sketches of which he made no use in the final version, Anatole France frequently reverted to the original resemblance between the speech of man and the speech of animals.

"Suppose we say that we don't know their language and that we do know our own. That's the main difference."

Elsewhere, à propos of a dog's bark, he says:

"Man utters a cry and speaks. An animal speaks and utters a cry. 'Hou! Hou!' Is that a cry, or a word? 'Oh' is a word when it comes from a man's mouth. Why shouldn't it be a word when it comes from a dog's?"

This analogy between man and the animals he carried still farther. They resembled each other not only in speech, but still more by their senses, their reasoning faculty, their inability to understand things and their causes.

"Man was, if you like, better constructed than an earthworm. But though he might be superior to every other mammal in existence, to an elphant, or a dog, or a monkey, for example, he was not essentially different from them. All the apparatuses of circulation, nutrition, generation were virtually identical. The brain and the nervous system in man were superior to those of the animals, an advantage for which he

had to pay dearly by having to be moral.

"The animals' reasoning apparatus for verifying the evidence of the senses was no doubt inferior to man's, but they used it to regulate their conduct, as we use our reason to regulate our own."

Then, having observed that the dog and man take virtually the same view of nature, Floris added:

"You know pretty well as much as I do, my poor Mitzi, concerning the world and life. But man, Mitzi, is too proud to admit it."

The state of ignorance in which the animals exist sometimes ensures them—does it not?—a kind of superiority over man. Take theology, for example. Has not that been a source of error and calamity?

"We make a deal of fuss about our knowledge. But a dog makes acquaintance with the external world very much in the same manner as we do. The means at his disposal are not equal to ours, but they are of the same nature. His mental picture of the

world is not so detailed as ours, but in comparison with the reality, they are on a level. And the dog's view contains few errors. Animals are ignorant of mathematics. But they are also ignorant of theology. It required a higher range of knowledge than theirs to conceive theology. Who knows whether, as we progress in knowledge, we shall not be led to form conceptions still more fallacious and more harmful, if such a thing be possible, than the 'conceptions of the theologians'?"

Anatole France also emphasized, again and again, the powerlessness of man to escape from himself.

"He is not made to discover his origin and his destiny. He is made to feel joy and pain, not to know and to understand."

"However ardently he may pursue his researches, he will never know aught of the Universe save that infinitesimal portion of it which impinges on his senses, which comes from himself. He will not know anything save the 'humanity' of things. Of all the

things that encompass him he will never know anything except what so far 'humanizes' itself as to find a way into his consciousness."

"He will never know aught of the walls of his dark prison-house save by the pain he will experience in hurling himself against them."

"To try to discover the First Cause from the witness of our senses is like asking the pot the origin of the clay of which it is made or that of the potter who bakes it."

He also dwelt much on the inadequate power of expression of the words at man's command.

"And supposing he had this knowledge, how would he be able to transmit it? What means of expression has he, what instrument does he possess, to enable him to impart anything other than his own sensations?"

Then he discharged more missiles at the metaphysicians and their language.

"The metaphysician takes his words when

they are worn as smooth as old pennies, and you can't make head or tail of them. And not content with taking words that have lost all their meaning, he introduces, like counters in his game, a host of words that are pure negatives."

"Ah!" he would exclaim, "how right was Diderot when he said that the metaphysician knows nothing! His science is the science of the non-existent. He has taken the coat of the coarsest sensualist and turned it inside out."

He insisted that a word should always denote an object capable of visualization.

"A word is nothing but a sound, when it is not a sign."

As regards the expression "pur esprit"—pure mind, pure reason—Floris, having declared that it was impossible to conceive anything pure in a universe where all things commingled and in combination, went on:

"All the same, one can understand the word 'pure' when applied to a wine or a

woman, but it has no significance whatever when used to qualify what is immaterial, like *esprit*, which is *spiritus*, a breath."

Or this variant:

"Nowadays, pure is a very hazardous epithet when applied to wine or young girls, and is devoid of all significance when used of a spirit, a breath."

And this is how Floris concluded his remarks on the impropriety of words:

"So you see where Metaphysics leads us. It is a merrier occupation than you think."

Whereto Thémine makes reply:

"Floris, in less than an hour you will make it up with Metaphysics. When you rail against her, it is but a lover's quarrel."

But if Floris was a lover, he was a very stern one, for he accused Metaphysics of the gravest misdeeds. As we learn from a final note, he looked on Metaphysics as the active principle of discord among men.

"Metaphysical philosophy is the only thing which acts upon mankind."

"The things we understand never engender difficulties or strife."

"We do not kill one another for an idea we can understand, but for something that has no meaning."

"Look at the Nicene Creed. Men slew one another wholesale over the sentence, 'Being of one substance with the Father,' which cannot possibly mean anything at all."

Many readers will have remarked that Anatole France had already dealt with the subject of Metaphysics. In the *Garden of Epicurus*, in particular, there is a Dialogue entitled *Aristos and Polyphilos on the Language of Metaphysics*. Both Dialogues are based on the same attitude of mind, and in some passages they resemble and almost reproduce each other.

Yet when writing the second, Anatole France takes no account of its predecessor. He forgets it, and banishes it entirely from his mind. And this is the proof. Before beginning his Dialogue he goes back to orig-

inal sources, consults authorities, verifies the definition of words, and surrounds himself with a rampart of notes, just as though he were entering upon a subject entirely new to him.

It is no easy matter to give an exact impression of these preliminary labours, of these notes made on loose scraps of every shape and size. First of all Anatole France puts down the most important terms in the discussion: Metaphysics, Name, Word, Mind, Being, Principle, Cause, Reason, Morality, Sense, Abstract, Abstraction, Concrete, Infinite, Indefinite, Immortal, Absolute. Opposite each of these words he writes down its etymology, Latin, Greek, or even Sanscrit, as the case may be. Then he puts down in full the meaning or meanings of the word. Of Metaphysics alone we find, among these slips of paper, no less than fifteen definitions.

Occasionally he adds a little commentary. He notes that the words *Être* and *Essence* have the same root. And after observing

that *Muttum* signifies a word, murmur, grunt, he adds, "It's the noise a pig makes." Or again, he notes in the corner of a page the difference between the two words "Indefinite" and "Infinite." " 'Indefinite' is something of which we do not see the limit," in contrast with " 'Infinite,' something of which we assert that it can have no limit."

He was not content with consulting grammarians like Pierre d'Olivet, or lexicographers like Boiste. He re-read the philosophers, as is proved by quotations, copied out in his own hand, from Pascal, Descartes, Buffon, Kant and a score of others.

All this preliminary work sufficiently proves that Anatole France intended to ignore his previous Dialogue when preparing the new one, a circumstance which lends a moving interest to the comparison of the two productions, written with an interval of forty years between them.

CHAPTER V

OTHER NOTES CONCERNING THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

ROM the passages omitted from the Dialogue in its final form. we have extracted those which relate to Metaphysics. We will now pass on to those which concern God and Religion.

In the Dialogue on Metaphysics and the Existence of God, Floris says that, if God exists, He ceased to be infinite from the moment He created the world, for then He became limited, enclosed by His own creation.

This idea had a special attraction for Anatole France, for it occurs, in a form almost identical with that of the finished Dialogue, in no less than eight preliminary drafts.

To say the truth, there was no call for

God to be overwhelmed with grief at losing His infinity. Infinity, as Anatole France pointed out in one of his notes, was an attribute that had its drawbacks.

"It cannot be gainsaid that He found His infinity a little embarrassing. For example, seeing that He was everywhere, He could not change His place."

But the loss of His infinity was not the only inconvenience the Deity incurred when He created the world, as we see from the following:

"It is impossible to believe everything that is said of Him. This is how His history is given in certain countries:

"A Being, infinite in space and time, after an eternity of solitude, was so imprudent as to create the world. What impelled Him to do so? you ask. They say it was Love, Love that brings such a host of follies in its train."

"His creation involved Him in serious deprivations and inextricable difficulties. He lost His independence. His relations

with an imperfect world and creatures of limited intelligence exposed Him to endless mortifications. The creation of man occasioned Him the most distressing disappointments. His peaceful days were over. He grew irritable, he growled and thundered. He repented, and repentance never mends anything."

"To govern mankind, He took it into His head to become moral, without any preliminary training. For having lived a whole eternity by Himself and enjoyed His pleasures alone, He had no morals and could not have any. In His dealings with man, He adopted the morality of a savage, as one might have expected He would. His cruel and outrageous deeds have been set down in a portentous book."

Concerning the moral code which God imposed on mankind he says:

"He handled the situation badly. It was as if a showman were to take it into his head to reward or punish his puppets for the features he had given them and the deeds he

made them perform. If a showman were so ill-advised as that, his puppets would say, 'We didn't ask to play this comedy, and we have played it as you made us play it. You pulled the strings. You've no call either to praise or blame us.' "

Yet another note animadverts on the defects of creation and the moral law.

"Either through incredible avarice, or perhaps from some mysterious reason hidden in the depths of His unfathomable wisdom, God did not make full provision for the nourishment of the animals, and He compelled them to maintain their miserable existence by eating one another. The result of this ordinance was that the earth became a place of abomination, reeking of blood and offal."

"For the rest, it cannot be said that the Creator troubled Himself unduly about the creatures that inhabit the earth, the air and the water. Man, on the other hand, He treated very seriously, for what reason is not quite clear. He laid upon him all man-

ner of injunctions concerning his food, and the propagation of his species, as if the wretched weight was not miserable enough already."

"To crown all, He insisted on his being moral, not automatically, but with the aid of punishments proportioned, not to the frailty of the creature, but to His own power and might. For God, contrary to all expectation, behaved as if He were still infinite in all respects and especially in goodness. That is to say, He launched against mankind His edicts of eternal damnation."

Anatole France proposed to compare the one God of the Christians with the gods of Olympus. These are his notes on the parallel between Monotheism and Polytheism:

"One God, if He makes a mistake, brings disaster on all who believe in Him. Even if He be wise, He has but one sort of wisdom suitable to one sort of man."

"The gods of the Greeks . . . owing to the diversity of their character are more fittingly adapted to the diversity of the human

temperament. Those gods lived in harmony together, though they did not agree on a single point. In the Trojan war, some sided with the Greeks, some with the Trojans. That alone taught the Greeks to have broad views."

"There were divinities for every temperament. An Aphrodite for the voluptuary, a Pallas Athene for the seeker after wisdom."

"None of these deities were free from failings, but their failings were mutually corrective."

"In all there was more of beauty and restraint than of might and greatness. They did not crush their worshippers by their immensity."

"They were human."

"Their history was credible and you were not compelled to believe it. Nowadays we are forced to believe in an incredible God."

"The great advantage of the Polytheism of the Greeks was that there were no dogmas. You were at liberty to think what

you liked, even about the gods, with nothing to fear save a temporary fit of anger due to threatened prerogatives or to excited passions. But intolerance with all its dread consequences was impossible."

"Zeus had his weaknesses; but he was wise, too, and he showed it. As for the God of the Christians, He cannot shed His Jewish origin, and that accounts for His terrible ferocity and a whole host of paltry meannesses. Even during all the years that have elapsed since His sojourn on Mount Sinai, He has not succeeded in acquiring a thorough polish. He is a twaddler, and a lie-a-bed; He thinks a great deal too much about cookery and love-making. Moreover He has one terrible fault; He is a logic-chopper. For a word, a syllable, He would lay waste the world with fire and sword."

"But the god of the Deists cannot be called One God. Every Deist makes his own god and contemplates himself therein. He does not obtrude himself over much. The god of Plato, of Jean Jacques Rosseau,

of Béranger, never did anybody any harm. As for Victor Cousin's god, he had a strange adventure. In his old age he turned Christian, and no one mentions him now. Who ever hears his name these days?"

Perhaps the discussion was to have been summed up in a phrase we find on three separate slips of paper, once in the margin, once in the corner, and once in the middle, of the page:

"Down with the One God!"

As touching the difficulty of recognizing the true God when there are so many to choose from, Anatole France reverted to a story he had already briefly recounted in an essay on Baudelaire, and which he developed as follows in the notes for his Dialogues:

"One day, at Théophile Gautier's, Baudelaire saw his friend Charles Asselineau handling a hideous little idol carved by a Congo nigger out of the trunk of a fig-tree. It was the figure of a man with a head twice

as big as his body, and a mouth stretching from ear to ear."

" 'What a horrible-looking thing!' exclaimed Asselineau, putting it down in disgust."

" 'Take care!' said Baudelaire. 'Suppose it were the true God!' "

Anatole France had roughed out, in four paragraphs, a discussion on the influence of Religion on national character.

"Judging by the violence of the feelings with which Christianity inspires you, I should say you believe it to be imposed on men by a supernatural power in order to make them different from what they are. Don't be disturbed. Christianity was man-made and can no more change men than a coat can change the body of its wearer."

"It can deform man, just as a coat can deform the body. The corset is not a heaven-sent device, but it can ruin a woman's figure. Men make religions and religions make men, or at all events shape

them. Humanity is in the position of that poor devil of a fellow who, being lonely and love-sick, created for himself, by a supreme effort of imagination, a companion who came down from heaven. He followed her over hill and dale, till he fell into a pond and was drowned."

"The daughters of heaven do not always drown the sons of men."

"Men are led on by their imaginings. They create gods and obey them. There is no harder taskmaster than the master you make for yourself, no crueller tyrant than the tyrant within you."

There is another draft-discussion on Christianity. It opens with a sort of catalogue of grievances.

"This Church, founded as it is on disastrous illusions, has buried Science and Beauty in the tomb for eighteen hundred years, and shed blood in torrents."

"She has dimmed the genius of the races that have adopted her."

"Christianity is a reversion to the most primitive barbarism—the idea of atonement."

"No personal responsibility even. . . . Crime must be paid for, but it matters not who pays."

"That brings us back to the savages."

"The basis of it is horrible."

"That is not seen in Jesus."

"But in Paul."

Here a disputant intervenes.

"Speak no ill of Paul. Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Positivists are all on his side."

"How is he to be refuted? He is unreadable."

However, Anatole France held that religions, great as the part they play in the history of man, have no influence on morals.

"Sometimes for Peace, sometimes for War, according to its sentiments or interests, Christianity has properly no morality of its own. It reflects the morals of the peoples

that foster it and, like the chameleon, takes on the colour of the ground on which it lights."

And again:

"In the same period and in the same society, there may exist several religions; there can be only one moral code. Libanius, Julian, St. Gregory, St. John Chrysostom, all had the same morality."

"To-day, Jews, Protestants, Catholics—all have the same principles and the same prejudices. Morality depends on the law. It is more authoritative than religions are."

Two further examples of these verbal duels. The first is on "salvation."

"People want to be saved. How do you account for it that they have aways chosen the most hazardous and difficult method?"

"It's the same with card games. People disdain the easy ones. They like difficult things, such as bridge, or terribly hazardous ones, like baccarat. There's a great likeness between cards and religion."

The other concerns belief in God.

"To believe in God or not to believe in Him. What is the difference? Not much. For those who believe in Him form no conception of Him. They say that He is everything. To be everything is to be nothing."

"But they invest Him with a will, with ideas, with views on the governance of the world, with a code of justice involving terrible penalties for its infringement."

"The ideas we assign to Him come from ourselves. We should have them whether we attributed them to Him or not. And they would not be any better."

Then follow a few isolated notes.

"We may therefore conclude that the existence of God is a sentimental truth. That need not surprise those who deem that man was made to feel and not to know. In man, whenever the intellect says one thing and the feelings another, so much the worse for the intellect."

"We render thanks to God for creating

this world, and praise Him for creating another quite different, where the wrongs of this one will be righted."

"God is the focus of all human contradictions."

"The impotence of God is infinite."

Perhaps a comparison of the various stages of his *dicta* concerning the existence of God will afford the best idea of the patience with which Anatole France wrought at his work. Be it remembered that, when he had gathered about him a vast number of detailed notes and extracts, of detached views, sketches, drafts and fugitive suggestions—when he had thus collected his raw material, he would sometimes re-write the same passage as many as eight times, often at long intervals of time. Such, at all events, was his practice in his later years, and it is incontestable that his fastidious taste, his insistence on minute and meticulous documentation, had long been characteristic of his work. There is extant a

valuable illustration of this connected with *The Gods are Athirst.*

In a big manuscript book bound in American cloth, Anatole France had drawn up a catalogue of the drawings, prints and sculptures in his possession. Later on he used the back of the pages to compile a calendar of the Revolution, from March 1, 1793, to May 20, 1795.

In two parallel columns, he entered the dates of the Gregorian and Revolutionary calendars respectively. Then, taking each day separately, he noted down the events—military, political, financial, economic—which took place on the date in question. He even recorded the state of the weather. Thus the spring of 1794 was an early one. Opposite the 15th Ventose (March 5) he writes: "Weather fine. You might think it was Germinal." On the 7th Germinal (March 27): "Pear-trees and plum-trees in full bloom. Peaches, apricots and almonds already formed. Apples well on." And

for the 21st Germinal (April 10) he wrote: "Rye in the ear, sainfoin in blossom." These notes occur alongside Danton's arrest and the sale of national property at double the estimated price.

This calendar was to guide him step by step through his work, after helping him to shape its general plan. The chapter numbers are recorded on it in blue pencil.

Now to return to the comparison of the successive versions of any given passage. That about Kant affords an excellent example.

This was the first draft:

"The worthy Kant did not find God in his porcelain pipe. He sent for Him to play the policeman in Königsberg, and rigged out this 'pure spirit' in a constable's uniform."

The second version ran:

"The worthy Kant, who was given to meditation, discovered the principles of human knowledge and the reconciliation of the various systems which share the territory

of philosophy, in the smoke that curled up from his porcelain pipe. But he did not find God in it. He multiplied his efforts to discover Him, but in vain. He had made up his mind to do without Him, when, walking one day through the streets of Königsberg, he beheld many scenes of disorder and sedition. Thereupon he resolved to keep God to see to the policing of the world."

And this was the third version:

"The worthy Kant, who was given to meditation, discovered the principles of human knowledge and the reconciliation of the various conflicting philosophic systems, in the smoke that curled up from his porcelain pipe; but he did not find God there. Having with great industry searched for Him in vain, he made up his mind to do without Him, when, taking a walk one day through the steets of Königsberg, that rich and populous city, he observed many scenes of disorder and sedition. Amid this tumult, at which the mind of the sage revolted in dis-

gust, God suddenly appeared, and the good philosopher immediately entrusted Him with the task of policing the world. . . ."

The sequel, regarding the firm foundation of a belief in God, also shows some interesting variants.

(*a*) "Great intellect as he was, Kant, for practical reasons, fell back on the idea of the common run of men who don't haggle about the omnipotence and perfection they ascribe to a God who aids and protects them, and whom they invest with eternity in the hope that He will make them immortal."

(*b*) "Thus, great intellect as he was, the philosopher of Königsberg fell back on the common belief of men who, in their thirst for happiness and life, embrace the idea of a Being, infinitely powerful and infinitely good, who governs the world that He created, punishes the wicked, and to the righteous grants everlasting felicity. They ascribe to Him ideas concerning the governance of the world, backed with terrible pow-

ers of punishment, which satisfy them because they are their own ideas, and their own justice."

(*c*) "Great intellect as he was, the philosopher of Königsberg fell back on the common belief of men, who refrain from haggling about the might and the goodness they ascribe to God in order that He may aid and protect them, and who proclaim that He is without beginning and without end in the hope that He will make them live as long as Himself. For man desires to live."

With the above, compare the final version:

"Thus, mighty intellect as he was, the Sage of Königsberg fell back on the common belief of mankind who, in their thirst for happiness and life, embrace an omnipotent Being, at once just and merciful, to whom they look for eternal happiness and the punishment of their enemies."

It will thus be seen that, towards the end of his life, Anatole France was in the habit of making one draft after another, some-

times re-writing the same passage as many as eight times.

He used to say that he did not compose his sentences in advance, in his head. He would get something down on paper, and work at it and fine it down, pen in hand. He contrasted his methods with Casimir Delavigne's, who had by heart a tragedy in five acts which disappeared with him. He had not written it when he died.

But the initial stream was copious and free. Throughout his later years he would often write an important article or speech, in the space of a few hours. And he retained his intellectual vigour to the very end. As we shall see later on, he himself stated that at seventy-five he did not know what it was to feel old. He had truly thrust back the tide of years. We must bear in mind that he produced three of his most important books, *Penguin Island*, *The Gods are Athirst*, and *The Revolt of the Angels*, between the ages of sixty-five and seventy.

He wrote to one of his friends saying that he had finished *The Bloom of Life*—his last book—"with a good deal of strength in hand," and that his work had never run on so smoothly.

He had no need, he used to affirm, of silence or solitude, in order to write. *Crainquebille* was written in the course of a journey, on a steamboat. Every chapter of the *Bergeret* books was dashed off of an afternoon, sometimes amid the buzz of a crowded "At Home." He used to say, in a joking way, "I must have an uproar about me. When I am alone, I read. When I am disturbed, I cannot read; so I write."

He made a great number of corrections in his proofs. But he did not undertake any arduous and laborious operations with scissors and paste, for he had already experimented with the order of his sentences on numerous preliminary drafts. Thus in 1912, in the course of his tour in Northern Africa, he corrected, at each successive stage of the journey, the proof sheets of *The Gods*

are Athirst. At Biskra, in particular, he recast the chapter in which Robespierre makes his appearance on the scene. But he employed no other instrument than his pen.

À propos of proof-reading, he made rather a striking remark to the secretary of a Review who, some time in 1921, brought him some proof sheets to correct. The emissary was very young and very much overawed. He shyly requested the Master to return the proofs as soon as possible; the next day if he could. With a benevolent, fatherly air, Anatole France admonished him as follows:

"Young man, you doubtless intend to take up literature as a career. Well, now, I will give you a little lecture on style. In this way, your morning will not have been entirely wasted.

"You ask me to correct my proofs immediately. That is much too soon. For it is necessary that I should first forget what I have written. True, that won't take me long, for at my age people grow forgetful. Still, it is necessary that I should forget it,

so that I may read it with fresh eyes. Then I shall see whatever cannot be taken in at the first glance, whatever is not plain and clear. Those are things I cut out, the things I correct. You see, the natural things are what go in last."

His ideas about style are well known. He summed them up in a short essay on Stendhal which appeared in 1920. In his view, the golden age of French literature was the seventeenth century. The model prose was Bossuet's. He also rated the eighteenth century very highly—but a little below the seventeenth.

"Of course," he said, "I prefer Diderot to Bossuet for ideas. But I prefer Bossuet to Diderot for style."

Nevertheless he had a special admiration for Rousseau. About the *Confessions*, he used to say, "To start with, it's sound common sense, then it grows beautiful, more beautiful, still more beautiful, amazingly beautiful. Every single sentence is duly subordinated to the whole."

Then came dark days for the French language. They began under Louis XVI, grew darker during the Revolution and the Empire, and were at their darkest during the Restoration. Whoever still retained a taste for form was obliged to invent a style for himself in accordance with his own notions of what was seemly and befitting, after the manner of Paul Louis Courier, who wrought himself a medium of expression with fragments of Amyot and La Fontaine. Chateaubriand, unmindful of the simplicity and honesty that should mark speech and composition, aimed at immediate effect. He was capable of such a phrase as, "The City, that wilderness of men." Stendhal was the only one to retain his spontaneity.

Thenceforth every one sought after originality in words and phrases, in vocabulary and syntax. Some, like the patient and laborious Flaubert, were pastmasters at the task. Anatole France refused to create an artificial language for himself. "I would not do so," said he, "and so it comes about

that my vocabulary is scanty. For example, I refuse to talk about 'mentality.' But I am compelled to go round and round, to find an equivalent for it."

In order to convey that Anatole France belonged to the Great School, that he carried on the traditions of the Philosophers of the eighteenth century, a certain critic made use of an ingenious formula. "He is," he said, "the greatest writer of the eighteenth century." The compliment was reported to Anatole France. Modestly, he affected not to understand it. "It shows that I am very old," said he.

As to his authorities for the Dialogue on the Existence of God, they were as numerous as they were for that on Metaphysics. Jotted down on odds and ends of paper are a host of quotations. All kinds of names jostle one another. The list extends from Æschylus to the moderns, taking on its way schoolmen like Ockham, and phenomenist philosophers like David Hume.

Some of the references are quite recent.

For example, there is mention of an essay in a Christian review by a Swiss theologian who, in the middle of the war, examines the religious crisis and utters a cry of warning. From it Anatole France selected and copied out the following anxious comment: "For more than fifteen centuries the Gospel has been preached in this Western Europe of ours, and this is what we have come to! Does it not spell the bankruptcy of our so-called Christian civilization?"

But the most curious document in the whole collection consists of about ten pages or so in which Anatole France has set down "The Religious Ideas of Napoleon." He took them, not from the *Mémorial de Sainte Hélène*, but from the unpublished *Journal*, by General Baron Gourgaud. "In the *Mémorial*," he used to say, "Napoleon sometimes concealed his thoughts. He was speaking for posterity."

Twenty-eight quotations, carefully transcribed, are followed by a recapitulation which sums them up and gives the volume

and page from which they were taken. There is no need to reproduce *in extenso* these "Thoughts of Napoleon collected by Anatole France," inasmuch as they have already been given to the public. The hero of the Coronation and the Concordat speaks his mind with singular freedom concerning the soul and religion. In Napoleon's view, the soul is composed of atmospheric fluids which return to the ether after death and are then absorbed by other brains. He is not sure whether the soul is immortal; at any rate it has no memory. The Emperor returns again and again to the close resemblance existing between man and the lower animals. He puts Islam very high. One can at least see Mohammed at work, whereas he holds very decidedly that Jesus never existed. If he had to choose a religion, Napoleon would worship the Sun that quickens all things, the true god of the Earth. He did not believe in a god that metes out rewards and punishments, for misfortune frequently befalls the upright, while the

wicked flourish. "You will see that Talleyrand will die in his bed." And, having decided in his own mind that all religions were invented by man, Napoleon concludes, "My dear Gourgaud, when we are dead, we are dead indeed."

In this same file, Anatole France included his notes for the preface which he wrote in 1918 for the *Thoughts* of Heraclitus of Ephesus. Among the materials which he was then collecting for his Dialogue on God, the cosmogonic conceptions of the Ephesian were intended to find a place. He laid great stress on the boldly prophetic views of his Ionian, as we may see from the following fragment, not included in the preface:

"What is really admirable about the early Greek thinkers is the firm grasp they had on the forces that rule the world. They made Fate the ruler of gods and men. Thus, they had already recognized the laws of nature and laid the foundations of Science."

It is clear that this preface, conceived at the same time as the Dialogue, when his

mind was running on these matters, often reflects the same ideas.

The fragments on the Existence of God are stamped with an agnosticism which is noticeable in a number of pages written by Anatole France at divers periods of his life. In his later years he acknowledged this agnosticism with quiet firmness. He confessed it in words which, though very simple, were nevertheless invested with a kind of solemnity, because he uttered them dispassionately, in the serenity of his old age and at a time when every man is led to sum up and to bear witness to his own intimate convictions.

He said firmly, and without hesitation, "Certainly I am an agnostic." Then, in a pensive tone he would add, "Yes, I have pondered on the matter. I do not believe in dualism in nature. The same laws govern all living creatures, and nothing more survives of man than of any other creature. Could anyone with any reasonable degree of intelligence think otherwise?"

Sometimes, too, he would explain how the gods are born in the imagination of men. "The gods," he said, "pass through various stages in the popular mind. And these stages are always the same. At first the gods *are* gods, creatures of the mind, invisible. Then they become human and take on the behaviour of men, and finally they come down to earth. This last stage is no more real than those which precede it. All are the fruit of the imagination."

Thus he was inclined to believe that Jesus had never existed. He told how he had tried to give an allegorical explanation of the origins of Christianity in his story of *Putois*, the notorious gardener, who from beginning to end was the invention of Monsieur Bergeret and his sister, and who finally came to be regarded as a real personage.

Sometimes he would fling off a defiant jest. "We've got plenty of duties to perform, as it is. Why go out of our way to create imaginary duties towards a non-existent God?"

And he would add, with a smile, that there was no merit in his professing his atheism nowadays, whereas, even as late as the eighteenth century, "a man could not openly express his convictions with impunity. To say you belonged to the reformed religion, cut you off from making a good match and from ordinary social intercourse. To avow that you were an atheist might involve you in life-long trouble." The Chevalier de la Barre, charged with mutilating a crucifix, was beheaded and burned, one hundred and fifty years ago, under Louis XV. This explains the lingering hesitation that "sicklies o'er" the atheism of some of the encyclopædists—they dared not avow it.

Even under Napoleon I, men concealed their unbelief. In the *Journal Inédit de Sainte Hélène*, which he was so fond of quoting, Anatole France had noted this saying of Napoleon's: "At the Institute, neither La Place, nor Monge, nor Berthollet, nor Lagrange believed in God. Only, they did not confess it." And he wound up by

saying, "When all is said and done, there have always been unbelievers, but in times when religion is in the ascendant they keep more in the background."

It has been written that Anatole France, having retained the impress of his early Catholic education, took, even in his sceptical days, a delight in the lure of sin, and tasted all the ecstasies of yielding to the temptations of the flesh. These perverse delights are said to indicate that, basically, he had a religious soul, and was thus attached to the Church by a subtle and sinuous bond.

The truth of the matter is, that he derived neither joy nor sadness from his atheism. Faith had never been his. He had refused to believe from the very moment he had begun to think. Age and meditation had but fortified his natural scepticism. Some critics have manifested surprise that this atheism of Anatole France's should have suddenly taken on a definite form and substance at the end of the last century. Their youth is the happy excuse for the astonish-

ment they profess; they did not live through the Dreyfus case. Only such as had attained to man's estate at that period (1897–1899) can thoroughly appreciate the influence which that great moral crisis exerted on men's minds. With a great number of men of all ages, it revealed, or precipitated, or stifled, their convictions. Every man was called upon to probe his conscience, and then to plunge into one or other of the two great human currents which had become discernible, the one progressing towards the future, the other flowing backwards towards the past.

The war itself did not effect so widespread and profound a moral cleavage as the Dreyfus case. So said Anatole France himself. During the "Affaire" two opposing doctrines stood face to face, two opposing parties aired their differences freely, in the broad light of day. During the war, orthodoxy alone was suffered to have a say. Bound, gagged, speechless, the opposition had no effective existence. Contradiction

was impossible, and there was none of that clashing of conflicting ideas which exerts such a profound effect on men's minds.

It must not, therefore, cause us astonishment that, in the great moral crisis amid which the last century was brought to its close, the social and religious ideas of Anatole France should have undergone a process of crystallization, that they should have been brought out into full relief and have taken on a clear and consistent character. He was called upon actively to defend those ideas for twenty-six years, until his death.

It is no doubt true enough that he found much to attract and interest him in Catholicism. We may go so far as to allow that even the influence of a devout mother and the education imparted to him at a semi-ecclesiastical college hardly suffice to explain his leanings in this direction. It was clearly not under the maternal wing, or in the classroom, that he acquired his prodigious acquaintance with scholastic and theological learning. Of his own accord he

travelled far along the road on which his education had merely started him. "I did not begin to learn," he was wont to say, "until after I had completed my studies."

Nor can it be gainsaid that he was in love with Christian art, although he complained of its gloom and melancholy, and rated it below the art of classical antiquity. Certainly he has portrayed for us many a simple and touching priestly character, and the Abbé Lantaigne, despite his fanaticism, the Abbé Guitrel, despite his subtlety, the Abbé Jérôme Coignard, despite his debaucheries, somehow engage and hold our affection. Nor can it be denied that it gave him pleasure to extend a welcome to Churchmen. How gracious and delightful, for example, were the courtesies he exchanged at the Carthage Museum with Père Delattre! How charming the interplay of fine manners and deep erudition that sparkled and coruscated above the mummy that lay at full length there before them in its open sarcophagus!

But let us reflect a moment. The Church, its art, its liturgy, its rites, its priests, possessed for Anatole France an undeniable attraction. Yet, despite that appeal, grace, in the theological sense, never found him. What, then, was the nature of the unquestionable appeal that broke in vain against the rampart of his unbelief? Is it not, in itself, an irrefragable proof of the immutability of his scepticism? His predilection for the beauties and splendours of religious ceremonial, though it lent a gentleness and a grace to his unbelief, did but show how unchangeable it was.

The fact that he was steeped in theological and ecclesiastical terminology stood him in good stead and enabled him to fight the Church on her own ground when he found himself compelled to take up arms against her. The last time he put in an appearance at the Academy, a certain Marshal told him that he read, admired and loved his work, and then added, "You'll never be so antimilitarist as I am, for, you see, I know what

military people are." In the same way Anatole France was a formidable antagonist to religion, for he knew all about the Church.

Though he liked listening to what priests had to say, he could always shake off their dominion whenever he chose. He used to tell how, when death had robbed him of "one who was very dear to him," he was visited by an Abbé, a gifted and attractive ecclesiastic, whose forte it was to bring wavering souls back to the bosom of the Church. The Abbé held up before his eyes the alluring prospect of meeting his beloved friend in another and a better world. Anatole France listened to him with the most patient and polite attention. Then suddenly he interposed with a question. "Shall we be able to have our *café au lait* together in the morning? To me that is the most delightful moment in a love affair." The Abbé, somewhat crestfallen, took his departure.

He took a livelier interest in Christianity than in other religions, but, for all that, it was an interest of the same order, the inter-

est of the historian, and the archæologist, the antiquary. It left no lasting impression on his heart. He had, despite what has been said to the contrary, nothing of the ecclesiastic in his everyday manner, none of the unction, none of the peculiarities of speech and gesture which are commonly associated with "the cloth."

And when he beheld death approaching afar off, when he looked it firmly in the face, aye, and deeming it over long in coming, bade it quicken its pace, it was not the hope or the resignation of the Christian that sustained him in that hour of trial. To those he loved he said simply, "I shall see you no more." He did not ask for a priest, and it is only right to add that, to the knowledge of his own household, the clergy made no attempt to intrude upon him. Nevertheless, pious souls were on the watch. Letters, fierce and anonymous epistles, bade him cower and tremble, for the hour was at hand when he would have to appear before the God of Vengeance.

CHAPTER VI

THE DIALOGUE ON OLD AGE

HE idea of writing on this theme was more recent than his plans for the other Dialogues. No papers on the subject of Old Age are to be found in the materials put in order in October 1918. Anatole France, who spoke little about himself, and still less about his books, did not mention the subject, and then only at rare intervals, until the year 1920. He pondered on the matter long and deeply. Among the documents and material he gathered about him, some articles from medical Reviews are dated 1922 and 1923. In this Dialogue, Floris and Thémine have disappeared. Anatole France (A. F.) debates freely and directly with the other interlocutor, whom he denotes by the abbreviation *Opt.* No doubt this optimistic

personage was to be entrusted with the duty of defending Old Age, while he himself, as we shall see, was to assume the task of deploring its evils.

All the materials had been brought together. Sometimes they were grouped in the form of question and answer, but more often they were just isolated fragments. Only the opening of the Dialogue is in a finished state.

A. F. "One evening during the present Spring, I was crossing the bridge of stone which leads to Tours, when the sound of lamentations and imprecations broke upon my ear, and I beheld a pair of arms waving in desperation in the airy void. It was our common friend, the friend to whom we are indebted for so many joyous hours, our pocket Molière, the charming Georges Courteline, who was denouncing Old Age as the arch enemy of the human race, Old Age of whose onslaught he, so far, bears but the very earliest hints. 'What would you say, Courteline,' I inquired, 'if you were as old as

I am?' Courteline had the good sense not to reply, and I, too, said nothing more. But be assured that my silence lays a heavier burden of reproach on Old Age than was poured forth upon it by the indignant outbursts of Courteline. Old Age, in my opinion, is the worst of ills. It robs a man of strength and vigour, of desire and all the good things of life, aye, not excepting his thirst for knowledge, which in the case of most men is the sole thing that makes life worth living."

Opt. "How unjust of you to complain of the passage of the years, you for whom Fate has reserved the happiest and most gracious senescence. Old Age has but touched you lightly with his finger-tips, leaving you all your faculties, all your intellectual endowments unimpaired, even to that thirst for knowledge which, according to you, is the only reason for living. It has robbed you of none of the rich possessions of your prime."

A. F. "I feel inclined to say to you what Monsieur Charles, the aged husband of

Lamartine's mistress, said to the people who told him he was looking well. The old fellow, who suffered tortures from fistula, said to them 'You wouldn't talk like that if you were to see my behind.' What Old Age takes away from me, if you want to know, is what it filches from everybody it lays hands upon. It has robbed me of the kindly regard of that goddess who is the delight alike of gods and men. True she never treated me with any special favour; but, inasmuch as I loved her, she suffered me to behold the lineaments of Beauty, and to taste of the only things that make life endurable. But the goddess knows not old men."

There are two variants of the first passage, singing the praises of Courteline:

"The author who is dear to us, to whom we owe hours of delight, the wise, the kindly Courteline, was uttering complaints this Spring, on the stone bridge of Tours, concerning Old Age, and saying it was our worse enemy."

And again:

"The wisest of men, the benefactor to whom we owe so many gay and bright-hued hours, our pocket Molière, the gentle Courteline, has a whole-hearted hatred of Old Age, which as yet he knows not. He detests it in advance."

Then come several statements and rejoinders which are not definitely assigned to any interlocutor but which are easily distinguished by their tenor, for or against Old Age.

"What is it that makes Old Age endurable? For we see that those who have descended into the shadows of its gloomy realm live on and sometimes even discover pleasure there."

"We get used to everything. The ills of Old Age are not new; they are the ills inherent in existence, but aggravated. Weakness belongs to all ages, so does the menace of death. We think little about it when we are young; we think more about it in our declining years, but we are not always thinking about it. You want to know how

man endures Old Age. I answer that he endures it as he endures life, by thinking little, or not thinking at all. He is not made for thought. For centuries without number the animals have never thought. Animal life was already a thing of very ancient date when the human intelligence came into being, and the human intelligence has adapted itself thereto but very imperfectly. Happily the human intelligence was inconsiderable and intermittent in its operation, and it has remained so. Nevertheless, by reason of it man is the most wretched of the animals. It is only in the human species that Old Age is cruel, even when it brings no physical suffering in its train."

"It is true that what renders Old Age cruel to men is that it brings them nearer death. But the degree of fear with which they regard it varies according to the shape in which it presents itself to their imagination. The belief that death will bring us face to face with an angry god is a very different thing from the belief that it will

merely send us back into the nothingness from which we come."

"How do you mean? There are people who are in greater terror of 'Annihilation's Waste' than they are of Hell itself."

"I quite believe it. We long to be eternal. But a man must possess exceptional strength of mind to ponder for any length of time on what comes after death. And whatever ideas we may entertain on the subject, our views are too vague and confused either to darken or illumine our old age."

"The Christian religion strikes terror to the heart. It made Pascal mad."

"He was predisposed to madness. But the majority of men form no very clear conception of what they believe and, so, escape madness."

The optimist made a brief and diffident attempt to extol what was of lasting value in life, such as virtue, for example. The reply will show us what was the greatest pleasure in the life of one who was held to be entirely happy.

"Virtue?"

"Virtue does something to satisfy our *amour-propre*. So does vice. But neither vice nor virtue makes us happy."

"But what of you, who are said to be happy?"

"Leaving out of account the couch of mortal woman, and the table at which one sits in company with a few choice friends, my greatest pleasure in life has been to say over to myself certain lines of Racine. And even so I had some sapless days during which I felt no love in my heart for a poetry of which I recognized the artifice. At such times I wept not for Monime; then Josabeth ceased to move me, even when she was making ready to cross the torrent of Cedron with the infant Joas."

Here are three passages concerning the definition of Old Age:

"Here we are arguing about Old Age and it has never occurred to us to settle what it is."

"Define Old Age! Be sure you never at-

tempt such a thing. Blaise Pascal tells us it is a mistake to define a thing which explains itself."

"Pascal held that view because his was a mathematical mind, indifferent to nature. But there are minds who would like to know about the objects of their arguments."

Concerning love of life:

"I love life."

"So much the worse for you. I love it not, and that is what enables me to put up with Old Age. I may say, as Monsieur Dubois used to say in the last century, that there has not been a single day in my life that I would live over again. You can't call that loving life. But knowing nothing else save life, I cannot say that it is entirely bad, since it is life that has revealed to me the good as well as the evil."

The remaining fragments are disconnected. These reflections and anecdotes on Old Age and old men occasionally take on a personal note, as though they were the commencement of a dialogue, notably two

short observations concerning the time of life at which Old Age begins.

"Few men reach Old Age, and they don't remain in it long. This ugly little tale counts for little in life. In bygone days it went for less still. In primitive times there were no old folk. There are none among the wild animals."

"In man, Old Age begins at sixty. When I was sixty I felt none of the symptoms of Old Age."

"In the case of some people Old Age gives warning of its approach by premonitory signs a long time in advance. Some it takes unawares. When I was seventy-five I was not expecting Old Age. Nevertheless it was close at hand."

"But is Old Age inevitable? Must everything that lives necessarily become a victim to it? Some years ago there was discovered in equatorial waters a mass of gulf weed which had existed for centuries, which was, perhaps, as old as the world and which nevertheless exhibited no sign of decay."

"The part of our body which should rightly be called glorious, distils an essence which, as it flows forth, creates within us a paroxysm of delight. It is the crime of Old Age to quench, together with that essence, all those delicious delusions with which it intoxicates our senses."

"The regret we feel at quitting life depends on the use we make of it; and that use itself depends on our beliefs and tastes. Those who think that life is a trial imposed upon us by God, ought to desire that it should be brief. No one ever wished to see a trial prolonged. But we hold such beliefs as if we did not hold them at all. Reality distracts our attention from them. And few believers are in a hurry to get to heaven."

"Existence is so short, that one must be very greedy of life to haggle about a year or two more or less."

"As the fabulist has it, *Our terms are equal in their brief duration.*"

"Will younger folk reach the tale of

years which it is no longer permitted us to attain? Life is sure for no one. But it is not less sure, within its narrower limits, for the old man who has given proof of his powers of resistance."

"I heard Vaughan say one day, 'The oldest man is the man who is nearest to death, and that is not always the man who bears the heaviest burden of years.' "

"Life is no shorter for the happy than for the unhappy. Suffering, like joy, gives occupation to the mind."

"We must bear in mind that the memory declines with increasing years. We forget most of the landmarks in our life, and it seems ridiculously short. In comparison, the few years, the months, to which we are entitled to look forward, seem long."

"We must also remember that we grow weary of living, and that we become less enamoured of life when its leaves begin to fall."

"That eighteenth-century dame who could

not bear putting on her clothes day after day. . . ."

"Then finally there is the thought that to grow old is an accomplishment and that some satisfaction is to be derived from watching those who cannot acquire it."

"There are as many kinds of Old Age as there are old men. There are some that are bearable. There are some that are intolerable. But they all have this in common, all alike denote the bourn of life."

"It is with old women as with old men. Each has her own way of being old. But it must not be supposed that age brings wisdom and peace to all. Old women are more libidinous than young ones. I owe that piece of knowledge to the confessions of certain 'pretty ladies,' to a lawsuit, and to the revelations of a medical man."

"Miserly old men: there's something reasonable in that. They fear to lose what they can no longer acquire."

"Grumbling, surly old men. And well they may be."

"The intellect of the old declines together with their bodies. How do you suppose it could be otherwise? Celebrated men are no exception. If their later works are admired, it is because their reputation is established and that they have accustomed the public to their defects."

"When he read my first book, Camille Doucet said to me, 'You are affected and your affectation makes you difficult to read.' I told him that that would cease to be noticeable as soon as people had got used to my style. Now they have."

"Every one entertains the foolish idea that old men are wise. They are cautious, nothing more. They are less intelligent than they were in the prime of life. In the Senate Library, one day, I heard Monsieur Dufaure, whose days were then nearly over, holding forth to his friend Monsieur Jouin concerning the fruits of his experience. Monsieur Jouin had said he was sorry that

Monsieur Thiers was not still in power, to which Monsieur Dufaure replied that Monsieur Thiers had committed many blunders. 'What were they?' Monsieur Jouin inquired. 'He offended a number of people,' said Monsieur Dufaure, 'and in such an exalted position as he occupied, one should offend no one.' I heard that with my own ears. I am not taking any exaggerated view of the abilities of statesmen when I say that I don't believe Monsieur Dufaure would have been capable of making such a silly remark when he was in his prime."

"I have never heard an old man say anything of value unless it was some memory of old times, something that had been seen, or noted, or said, in days long past. They never do anything new that is of any value."

"The older we get, the later we put the onset of Old Age."

"In 1859, when *Faust* was being performed for the first time, Jule Simon, seeing the chorus of Old Men imitating with bowed legs and trembling limbs the most advanced

senility, asked the composer how old he made his men out to be."

"Gounod, who was then only forty, said that they were quite aged, as much as fifty-five and sixty years old."

"Thirty years later, Jules Simon was again listening to *Faust* with the composer by his side, and he put the same question to him. Gounod, who was then in the autumn of his days, replied, 'Oh my old men are real old men; they are eighty and ninety.' "

(In the margin of the last paragraph, Anatole France has a note, "Verify the death of the two interlocutors." The dates were verified, and they were both alive at the second performance referred to, in 1886. Gounod died in 1893, Jules Simon in 1896.)

"In October 1915 people were growing sick of war. With a view to investing it with the necessary solemnity, the French Government took it into their heads to add to the cabinet a dozen or so of illustrious

elders whose names I forget. They looked a sorry crew."

A variant of the above:

"In those august days, when our young men were being slaughtered wholesale, it was thought well to give an added touch of solemnity to things by adding to the Ministry the most illustrious Elders of the Republic, so that the French Republic should have its Appius Claudius, its Fabricius, its Coruncanius and the rest of them. They excited pity."

(In the margin Anatole France totalled up the ages of six of them and found they amounted to four hundred and forty-nine years.)

"The Senate takes a pride in being, as its name implies, an Assemby of Elders. But the harangues of its leading elders are listened to year by year with more respect than enthusiasm."

"I am inclined to approve of that custom in force among savages, who make the old men of their tribe climb up a tree and then

shake the tree and so kill those who are not strong enough to hang on."

"Ah, if there were only another way of living a long time."

In his Dialogues, Anatole France was anxious to consider Old Age in all its aspects. In order to find things to say in its favour, things which he could not see in it himself, he had recourse to a certain friend of his. This friend was still in his prime, and it was he whom Anatole France had in view when he wrote this note:

"Put into the Dialogue a character that likes Old Age. See what Couchoud has to say."

"Old Age is life's best period."

"Old Age is not a disease. On the contrary, we see old men whose health is more stable than it was in their youth and middle-age."

"What is finer, after a life filled with tasks well done, than to taste the sweets of well-merited repose and, with all one's physical and mental faculties unimpaired,

to enjoy the evening of one's life?"

"One is a better man and more capable of enjoying life."

"One enjoys life calmly and steadily. Old Age is a broad river."

Anatole France had read a great deal in preparing the material for his Dialogue on Old Age. He covered whole pages with extracts from Aristotle, Cicero, Brantôme, Rabelais, Montaigne, Descartes, Voltaire, Diderot, Lamotte, Casanova. Some of these quotations he followed up with a commentary.

For example, at the end of the copy of a letter in which Descartes flatters himself with the hope of enjoying a long and happy old age, thanks to a careful diet, Anatole France points out that, according to the Abbé Picot, a zealous and whole-hearted admirer of the Philosopher, Descartes might have discovered how to live for several centuries. And he ends his note with these words: "He died aged fifty-three years, ten months and eleven days."

Elsewhere he gives the following version of a story of Brantôme's:

"Brantôme one day came across an old man whom he had known in his young days as a very dashing youth, very much of a buck, and a great favourite with the ladies. He had become an apothecary and compounded electuaries. He discovered him surrounded by his various phials, and the old fellow confessed to him that none of his elixirs were worth anything like as much as that most delectable essence which, in his young days, he had used so freely, enjoyed so much, but which Old Age had filched from him."

And Anatole France adds:

"There, in a few lines, Brantôme composed a better treatise on Old Age than that which it took Cicero thousands upon thousands of words to put together."

Appended to another version of the same story, we find this variant:

"There we have Old Age summed up in

a few lines better than Cicero described it in a whole treatise."

At the same time Anatole France had gone deeply into the scientific aspect of the question. He had made a point of reading the most recent physiological studies on the subject, such as Professor Lacassagne's *Green Old Age*. He had also got together a number of articles which he had cut out of various medical publications. There were, further, numerous reports specially written for his information, one, for example, which drew attention to that ominous malady, sclerosis, as a sure sign of old age; another analysing the theories of Metchnikoff and Voronoff, which seem to foretell the advent of the day when, as Descartes had said, "Human life might be indefinitely prolonged."

Amid all this agglomeration of notes and memoranda, Anatole France had reserved an important place for the mystery of Death and a Future Life. We have seen that he

had already broached the subject in documents relating to his Dialogue on the Existence of God, and in fragments of dialogue and detached reflections on the subject of Old Age.

But the documents which he did not use make it quite clear that he intended either to develop the subject in a final revision of the Dialogue on Old Age or to devote a special Dialogue to the subject of Death.

First of all, in these notes of his, we come across a sort of tabular statement of the darker deities of Mythology; Demons of the blue-black colour of meat flies; winged *genii*, Sirens, ravishing angels, Muses of Death, Harpies.

Then follow investigations concerning the transmigration of souls. Metempsychosis, and India, where that belief first came into being and where it still flourishes.

Then we have a reference to that philosophy so dear to Camille Flammarion, which holds that souls flit from star to star, and according to which we became what Ana-

tole France calls "moths of meditation."

Then follows a passage from Lucretius beginning, "What, then, is Death, and wherefore should we heed its terrors if the soul must perish with the body? Were we sensible of the troublous history of Rome in the centuries before we were born, when all Africa came into violent collision with the Empire?" The passage ends thus: "Well, well, when we have ceased to live we likewise shall know nought of what is happening around us, or rather we shall be no more, and the mingled wrack of sky and land and sea will no more awaken any emotions within us." The whole passage is copied out in Anatole France's own hand. He often used to quote it from memory, right up to the very end of his life. It was, so to speak, his *Credo*, and he used to say that nowhere else had the return into the void ever been expressed with such force and majesty.

Finally, there was the prayer of Philoctetes, who, unable to cure his poisoned

wounds, calls upon Thanatos, the god of Death, "twin brother of Hypnos, the god of Sleep. Death, amiable death, sole cure for ills unbearable, for no pain can reach the dead for evermore."

CHAPTER VII

THE DIALOGUE CONCERNING THE FUTURE

HE scene of this Dialogue was to be a promenade at Cannes, and its characters, the Baron de Ténar and his companions.

A young man was passing by, a young man of twenty, fair as the day. Floris was amazed at the great number of such young men who take no interest in women or in politics, and who live entirely for sport.

Said the Baron de Ténar:

"That's nothing new. Such were the young Greeks in the Golden Age."

And he quoted from memory: "The young men belonging to a given district used to go to the house of the Master of Music, marching along in a body, keeping step and due order, even though the snow

should fall like flour from a sieve. There they were taught the awe-inspiring Hymn to Pallas, the destroyer of cities, and the sound of their singing echoed far and wide. They retained the grave harmony of the traditional airs handed down from their forefathers. If any one of them took it into his head to play the buffoon, or to sing with effeminate or far-fetched modulations, he was struck and chastised as an enemy of the Muses."

"At the Gymnasium, at the palæstræ, in the speeches in the Market Place, they were told what to do in order that they might have a powerful chest, a clear complexion, broad shoulders, a short tongue, muscular hips, and a small penis."

"They were taught to take delight in simple things. 'Thou shalt go to the Academy and wander at leisure beneath the sacred olives, a crown of flowering rushes on thy head, together with a sedate companion of thine own age. Amid happy ease thou shalt enjoy the sweet odour that the smilax and

the leafage of the white poplar exhale on the fair spring days when the plane tree and the young elm mingle their gentle murmur. Happy the young man who can recall memories such as these.' "

And Monsieur de Ténar went on:

"Such were the young men of Athens when life was simple and virtue still held sway. They changed, as you know. Modesty did not reign for ever."

The young men went to see the women dancing, never fearing lest in the midst of their ecstasy a harlot should toss them the apple. And their faces were pale, their shoulders narrow, their chests contracted, their tongues long and their buttocks fleshless.

And this decadence of Greek manners, ever since the times when the Athenians "caught up their hair with golden cicadas," brought the Baron de Ténar to this conclusion:

"It is true that races have a period of growth, maturity and decay. But these

phrases are not clearly differentiated. There is much of maturity and old age to be discerned in the youth of a race, and there is still a deal of youth in its decrepitude. Could we pronounce straight away on the age of any single country in Europe?"

But since each nation thus describes its appointed curve, is not history continually beginning over again, or is every successive civilization superior to those which preceded it? And the talk turned on the future, on progress.

The person who was to act as the mouthpiece of Anatole France vigorously contested the notion of unlimited progress and endless upward tendency. He denied that there was such a thing as progress:

"Save in the sense of sequence and succession, in which succession there are both gains and losses."

The idea of progress in the sense of a continuous, indefinite advance is a modern idea.

"It belongs to the Liberals of 1830.

Nothing that we see in the nature or in the social condition of man affords us any example of it. Where is the progress of those ferns, for instance, which were once trees in those hot solitudes where their sole visitants were winged insects? Where is the progress of the Ichthyosaurus, of the Plesiosaurus, of the Mastodons and of the Aurochs? Where is the progress of the whale, whose race is nearly extinct? The ants would long ago have been sovereigns of the earth if they had made any progress in intelligence."

"But what of man?"

"For centuries without number man has shown himself capable of perfecting his tools, but not his mind; and all the various apparatus with which he arms himself will not save him from the fate of the mastodons and the aurochs. His race will perish. The fate of the race is inherent in the fate of the individual."

He laid special stress on these two points: the human intelligence is not perfectible;

the progress of civilization is certain, but it is limited, seeing that it is bound up with the evolution of the species.

"Man is not more intelligent to-day than he was of old. He has accumulated resources of every kind and he employs them in order to create others; but the inventor of Wireless Telegraphy is not more intelligent than the inventor of the Wheel."

"He has more industry, not more brains. He makes war with more devices, but not with more intelligence, than the savage."

"You don't think that in the end we shall return to the Stone Age?"

"I did not say there was no such thing as evolution. It would seem that the human race, like the individual, proceeds from infancy to maturity and from maturity to old age. It will not go back to the Stone Age, but it will relapse into decrepitude."

"Every species has a beginning and an end. Mankind will come to an end. Though we know not what thoughts stirred in the mind of the last of the mastodons.

we may take it that they were nothing very remarkable. It is hardly likely that the last man will have the mind of a Goethe. He will die, and that will be the last stage of human progress."

Then he dwelt on the helpless plight of man, who must needs slaughter in order to live, whether he be a flesh eater, or a vegetarian.

"It is a certain fact that men will continue to be cruel and blood-thirsty, so long as they go on eating the flesh of animals. Killing animals and killing men—there is but a step betwixt the two."

"But plants also have life. To eat vegetables is still to carry out the law of killing which is imposed upon us. Do you think that the vegetable world presents forms of life that are more negligible than the animal world? You are less impressed by them because they are not brought so vividly before you."

"Until the extinction of this miserable planet, life will go on issuing from death.

Eat nothing but salads, it makes no difference. To live, is to kill; and if you don't kill animals, you condemn them to death."

"Man, like all other animals, only lives by slaughter. The first of the arts is to kill, the second is to procreate. Round about these two arts we have cultivated innumerable others which do but subserve and embellish the first two."

"The obligation to kill, which is laid upon all animals subsisting upon this planet, the brevity of their cruel and painful existence, this law of carnage which dominates the world, this necessity for destruction, teaches us our nature and our end. We are destined to manure the earth, so that better and fairer forms of life may quicken upon it."

But it was not only the extinction of the species that Anatole France foresaw. He envisaged also the end of the planet, and thus the necessary curtailment of our hopes. The final species which he considered might follow man could not improve indefinitely because:

"The sun will go out, the earth will go rolling on in space, until the final cataclysm which shall destroy it."

One of the disputants then inquired whether it was opportune to reveal to mankind the infirmity of their condition and the inevitable end which awaited their species and the planet on which it dwelt. And he made answer:

"To begin with, they would not believe me. They only believe in the things that flatter their hopes."

"But some rare spirits, capable of realizing the truth and of looking their destiny in the face, will learn from my philosophy how to make the best of their unhappy condition and will find a solace in so doing."

Thus, Anatole France was dominated by an idea, which, despite what he says, leaves the majority of us indifferent—the idea that the human race, nay, the earth itself, will come to nought. The thing obsessed him. He formed the same idea of the life of the race as of the life of the individual. The

race too would describe its appointed curve, which would take it from its birth to its death. His gaze was ever fixed on the inevitable end. Thus he refused to entertain the idea that humanity was capable of unlimited progress. Nevertheless, great hopes may legitimately be entertained by those who hold that the human race is still in its infancy, and that its apogee is even yet far distant.

Anatole France did in fact believe that, though human nature is not perfectible, the conditions of social life could, and must, be ameliorated. He never failed to insist on the distinction between intellectual and social progress. The former is impossible, the latter assured.

Even when he was most anxious to make converts, he never omitted to instruct his hearers in what he believed to be the truth. If he held out the hope that, in the distant future, the international relationships of the various races of the world would be altered for the better, he did so, "not on the ground

that men would become better in themselves (that we are not permitted to hope for), but because a new social order would necessarily entail it." In a word, he considered that the human species, in the course of its limited evolution, must inevitably improve the social conditions of its existence.

Thus it was that he made common cause with the most advanced political parties, in the hopes of hastening that happier era. He accepted their views and lent them his aid. Although some words quickly lose their original meaning and are purposely disfigured to the point of becoming bugbears and instruments of terror; and although any single label is too limited to cover so broad a mind, it is only right to admit that, toward the end of his life, Anatole France did entertain ideas that were favourable to Communism.

His sociological views, their origin, their causes, their consistency, were freely called in question. The polemics show to what an incredible extent political passion can mis-

lead men's minds. We may here draw attention to some of the more glaring of these misconceptions and distortions.

Far be it from me to seek to annex so great a man as Anatole France to a political party which he himself transcends, and whose doctrines of violence I emphatically repudiate. My object is to refute with facts the misrepresentations of his more malevolent detractors.

The opponents of Socialism sometimes accept, and sometimes refuse to accept, Anatole France as an adversary. They therefore explain his political attitude by saying either that he did not mean what he said, or that he was actuated by self-interest, according as they are moved by mortification at losing him, or by the hope of regaining him as an ally.

But what a bewildering diversity of notes these voices sound. Some will tell you that Anatole France was led to become a Socialist by an instinct for destruction; wishing to destroy the world, he adopted the doctrines

which would hasten its ruin. Others will say that it was mere vanity, just a pose—he thought it looked well to appear as the friend of the poor. Others will tell you it was pure perversity, mere love of paradox—this scholar, this dreamer, a sorry, timid creature, wanted to display the strength and energy of a man of action. Then again they will tell you that Anatole France, tired of mocking at everything, of denying every creed, had at length resolved to foster and believe in some cause or other, and so had embraced a faith, albeit an unworthy one. Or else that he was a Monarchist at heart, but that having given up all hopes of a restoration, he had reluctantly thrown in his lot with the diametrically opposite party. Or, once more, that he had been influenced by Jaurès; not, of course, the sincere, the magnanimous, the patriotic Jaurès, whose clear-sighted patriotism could not fail to strike every fair-minded reader of his crowning work, *L'Armée Nouvelle;* but the Jaurès disfigured and distorted by hideous

calumnies which prompted the arm of some feeble-minded fanatic to murder him.

Some of his detractors will have it that he took up the Socialist rôle for the mere satisfaction of playing a part, or else that he adopted Socialistic opinions as he might have adopted any others, being convinced in his own mind that they were all equally contemptible. One of these critics, whose ignorance of his subject, of Anatole France's singular modesty and indifference to fame, passes all bounds, will have it that he entered the political arena in order to ape certain great writers of the past, and to glorify himself in the eyes of posterity, in order to add to his immediate prestige and to win renown, in after years, as the herald of changes to come.

Finally, they will demonstrate to you, with a brave array of proofs, that he could not have been sincerely a Socialist, for his professed opinions were in conflict with his nature. His sympathies were individualist, aristocratic; he was not sufficiently com-

passionate or sensitive; he was too self-centred, and valued the refinements and amenities of life too highly, to go forth making converts. He had not mixed with the common people; contact with the masses made him shrink into himself. What pleasure could he possibly have found in associating with the illiterate, the fanatic and the pauper? What cause had he to hurl his anathemas at social conditions from which he himself suffered no prejudice?

Such were the wounds which unjust testimony sought to inflict upon him. Sometimes misrepresentation took a more flagrant, more material form. One pamphleteer gravely informs us that Anatole France had had his motor car painted red "so that it should not look like the car of a bourgeois." As a matter of fact, the car in question did not belong to him, and when certain intimate friends of his placed it at his disposal it had long since been painted red, although their political opinions were as distant as the poles from those of the

Socialists. From that single example one may judge of the rest. We need not concern ourselves with those fanatical adversaries of Anatole France who, as a crowning calumny, would call his very sincerity in question. Blinded with malice, they overshoot their mark. But why have his other opponents gone out of their way to seek for such tortuous reasons for his political attitude? Why not recognize the simple fact that he merely acted in strict obedience to his convictions?—for that is the plain truth.

It is an undoubted fact that the Dreyfus case, from the social, still more from the religious, point of view, revealed him to himself, determined his course of thought and action and brought him out into the world. Nevertheless, it did but precipitate and give a definite contour to opinions he already held. Glance once more at *Jérôme Coignard*, which was written before the Dreyfus case. He had always cherished within him the hope of better things and he had never ceased to long for their advent. As he con-

ceived them, they would accord with his need for harmony and moderation, that is to say, with the very essence of his being. We need not look farther afield for the principal source of his convictions.

Harmony and moderation—this two-fold ideal which he fostered in his heart—were outraged at every turn by our existing social system with its feudal basis; the monstrous inequality of the conditions of life, the contrast—none the less deplorable because we see it every day—between excessive wealth and excessive poverty, the unfair distribution of the fruits of toil, the partiality of the law—so indulgent to the strong, so harsh to the weak.

It was precisely these violent contrasts that had disappeared in the future state such as he imagined it. In the picture of the future with which he concludes *The White Stone* he puts the following words into the mouth of his apologists of the twenty-third century: "We have but a single word to express our social system.

We say that we live in harmony . . . we have made life endurable to all. . . . We see to it that every man furnishes what he is capable of giving and receives what he himself has need of. . . . We have set up work in honour. We have assured to every one the means of livelihood. . . . Our organization is not immutable. But the progress of human civilization will henceforward be harmonious in all its stages."

If the injustices of the present social system had not outraged his ideal of moderation and harmony no less than his kindly intelligence, would Anatole France ever have created *Crainquebille?*

What grounds are there for the allegation that his fastidious refinement forbade him to take any genuine interest in the masses? How untenable a plea! Was it not a section of the aristocracy who supported the Encyclopædists and thereby paved the way for the Revolution? May not a man of taste indulge in the hope that taste will become more general? Cannot

one of the privilged classes conscientiously rise in revolt against unjust social conditions, because, forsooth, he himself is not a victim of those conditions? May he not be profoundly convinced that his own caste is responsible for the moral wretchedness of the masses whom it keeps in blank and brutish ignorance? Or must he, if he would prove his sincerity, play to the gallery and ostentatiously jettison the advantages fortune has given him? How would the popular cause benefit by that? Is it not rather his duty to support his convictions with all the resources with which the fates have endowed him? Do we insist that our doctor should himself be a sick man, before he comes to attend upon us?

Anatole France loved the working classes and was beloved by them. I have elsewhere described how he enjoyed long talks with working men, talks in which he would at once put himself on their level, win their confidence, and speak to them in words that never failed to find a way to their hearts.

"When he is with them," I wrote, "he plies them with questions, he makes discoveries, he adds to his stock of knowledge. He admires their skill, their patient handiwork, their sound common sense. He regards them as being at least as interesting as those who have been more favoured by fortune. He has no more respect for the great than disdain for the humble. In his eyes, the social ladder is a horizontal one. During the ten years he lived in Touraine he counted artisans among his friends, even among his advisers. And they, at all events, did not profane his memory."

No, the popular instinct was not deceived. "He is one of us," the working men used to say. Every face would light up with affectionate pride when he came to visit a workshop or a factory. And they were wholehearted in their devotion to him. For example, somewhere about 1917, he was anxious to have some rebuilding work put in hand at his old quarters at the Villa Saïd, which he had quitted some months before

the war, without any idea of ever going back there again. It was a difficult thing to get such work done at that time, for all building was at a standstill. Yet the various workmen threw themselves into the work with a will and when the house was finished, Anatole France might have read in several of the rooms, scored with a pencil on the plaster while it was still wet, the famous watchword, "The union of the workers means the peace of the world."

A crowd, it was often said, filled Anatole France with a sort of panic and made him shrink into himself. Perhaps it was so. Nevertheless, from the time of the Dreyfus case to the end of his days, he confronted such crowds many hundreds of times. And he sought neither their applause nor their votes. What power, then, was it that overcame his reserve? What power indeed, if not his irresistible desire to proclaim what he believed to be the truth?

To deny it to others one must one's self be incapable of that generous and unselfish

impulse which, because they feel that they must convince their fellows, win their hearts, and give themselves unstintingly to the cause that is dear to them, compels the most shrinking and most timorous to mount the tribune.

How, it may be asked, did Anatole France regard the prospect of a Revolution? It has been stated that in *The Gods are Athirst*, he expressed his condemnation of the French Revolution. Against that view he never ceased to protest. He has many times explained his purpose in writing that work, in which the splendours and excesses of the Revolution were alike brought out into clear and impartial relief. "It was," he said, "my design to show that men are not sufficiently perfect to mete out Justice in the name of Virtue and that, in all their actions, gentleness and compassion should be their guide."

When the Russian Revolution of 1905 was relentlessly crushed by the forces of Tsardom, Anatole France, on no less than

ten occasions, gave public expression to his indignation, his compassion and his hopes. "Whatever may be the issue of an enterprise so vast and awe-inspiring, the Russian proletarians have even now wrought a decisive influence on the destinies of their country and of the world at large." And so he hailed the Revolution of 1917 alike as a recompense and as a resurrection.

"When one accepts a doctrine," he freely admitted, "one must accept it in its remotest consequences. When one belongs to a party, one must be in the forefront, where the fighting is thickest, at the point which is nearest to the future and which the main body invariably reaches at long last."

He also said—as Henri Barbusse said after him—that in the weltering chaos in which we live to-day one must needs be an "extremist" in one direction or another. One must be either for the "Right" or for the "Left," for Reaction or for Revolution.

Anatole France, then, was for Revolu-

tion. He even faced the possibility of civil violence, hoping, nevertheless, that violence would be avoided. "Not every Revolution," he used to say, "is attended with bloodshed. We are still brought up on the Classics, however, and are given to dress up sedition after the pompous models handed down to us by the Roman historians."

It will be seen that he was still expressing the hope of a peaceful Revolution in an appeal he intended to address to the electorate in 1919. The following is the text of this unswerving profession of his faith in Socialism. Anatole France included the manuscript original of it among the material for his Dialogues, and it does not appear ever to have been given to the public.

"Citizens,

"By your votes it behoves you to condemn the bourgeois Governments which have proved themselves alike incapable of

preparing for war, of preventing it, or of waging it. Deaf to the warning voice of the great Jaurès and the Socialists, those Governments imperilled the safety of the nation by the enactment of the three years' Military Service Law, a measure which reveals their complete inability to understand the conditions in which the shock of opposing nationalities would come about. When the hour struck, they showed that they possessed neither the clearness of mind, nor the steadfastness of heart, nor even the honesty of purpose necessary to stave off the conflict. The sole contribution made by them to the conduct of the war—what time the nation in arms was saving France from destruction—was to pander to the capitalists at the risk of crushing their country beneath the burden of an appalling debt. And to-day they insolently boast of having prolonged this war of extermination beyond the limit necessary to secure the safety of the nation and, as a piece of crowning infamy, actually pride themselves on having

ended it by a peace as vague, contentious and insidious as it is inimical to the true interests of France, a peace that is incomplete and pregnant with fresh wars, with suffering and ruin.

"Citizens, it behoves you to condemn the bourgeois Governments who refuse to disarm conquered Germany for fear of depriving France and the Allies of a reason for maintaining armies and arsenals and munition factories and all the criminal sources of capitalistic wealth.

"It behoves you to condemn the bourgeois Governments, in that, not content with suppressing in France all freedom, all political life, nay, all semblance of thought, they are at this moment doing their utmost, at the cost of lives and treasure, to drown the Russian Revolution in blood. They were not ashamed to appeal to Germany to help them tighten the blockade of a great people and so bring about by starvation the death not only of the champions of Russian freedom but of

old men, women and children, a policy so cruel that they were called upon by Germany herself to mitigate the inhumanity of their measures.

"By your votes you must condemn them.

"Citizens, who is it that is thus speaking to you? What voice is that which swells my own and lends it a power sufficiently great, maybe, to find an echo in every generous heart? It is the voice of Socialism!

"The Socialists present themselves to the people, alone, without alliances, without leagues, because they alone are innocent of the errors and crimes that marked the older Societies, and because they come with ideas for the reparation of ancient wrongs and the conception of a new social order.

"This new Society will be founded on a better organization of labour, on the application of syndical law, and on the resumption by the nation of all the chief means of transport and of all the great metallurgical works. That is the corner-stone of the building.

"Citizens, let us not close our eyes to realities. Class war will not cease until the classes themselves have disappeared. The war, though we wanted it not, has brought the hour of that disappearance appreciably nearer, and has created an economic situation that must prove fatal to that capitalist system which it at first so monstrously inflated. All things are hurrying us onward towards Socialism, and the tide is bearing along with it, with equal rapidity, those who struggle against the movement, those who resign themselves to it and those who are fain to aid it.

"Nothing will stave off the Revolution which must inevitably come, and which is even now being accomplished beneath our eyes. But it depends on you, Citizens, whether it shall be a peaceful Revolution, or a bloody one. It will be gentle and kindly to those who aid it and direct its course. Blind are they who cannot see that a new order is coming to birth. May

it, thanks to your wisdom, unfold itself in tranquil majesty.

"May the powers that be, strive to understand. Let them silence the voices of arrogance and greed. Let them come to us, who are Justice and Peace.

"What is Socialism? It is the Conscience of the World!"

He even prophesied the motto of the Revolution that was to come. "All Revolutions," said he, "have their watchword. In the Revolution of 1789 it was the famous utterance of Siéyès on the Third Estate. The Revolution of 1830 was accomplished to the slogan of 'Long live the Charter.' The Revolution of 1848 appealed for the extension of the franchise. The next Revolution will have its motto also. It will be accomplished in the name of co-operation. The workers will demand a voice in the management of the great industrial enterprises. Co-operation and participation will take the place of salaries and wages."

For a moment he thought that this Revolution would follow on the general strike of May 1, 1920, when the railway men were clamouring for the nationalization of the railways. And it was then obvious to all how sincere and firm his convictions were.

Of his sincerity he had given many proofs. During the war and after the war, when mere sympathizers with Socialism or avowed Communists were alike harassed, persecuted and penalized for their attitude, was he not always ready to put in a word for them, to protest against any unjust verdict, to petition for their pardon?

The list of those he thus defended with his weighty voice is a long one, and it is not the least honourable monument to his memory.

And on this occasion too we saw what personal risks he was prepared to run to secure the triumph of his cause. At the end of April 1920, the restoration of the Villa Saïd was at length completed, and

Anatole France, fearing the effect that the moist climate of Touraine might have upon them, was anxious to send back to his Paris home the more valuable of his books and art treasures. When the general strike broke out, the van laden with its precious freight was held up somewhere on the railway, no one knew where. The Revolution, bringing all traffic to a standstill, might have exposed to loss, theft, pillage or fire this van and its contents, of which he could obtain no tidings, and which bore within it the fruit of half a century of toil. Nevertheless he continued, in his public utterances, as well as in his private conversation, to express with feverish eagerness his longing, as hour followed hour, for the coming of the Revolution.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DIALOGUE ON SEX-MODESTY

NE of the notes in which Anatole France jotted down his plans for Dialogues reads as follows:

"Compose a Dialogue on Modesty, quoting Tabarin as being a first-rate authority."

He had a keen relish for the little dramatic scenes in which Tabarin's mischievous daring is brought out into conspicuous relief by the laboured utterances of his master Mondor. He would often read some of these gay little tales aloud, or get one of his circle to read them to him. It was one of his real delights. It is not, therefore, surprising to come across an allusion to Tabarin among the notes which he intended to incorporate in his Dialogue on Modesty.

Here, as for his other Dialogues, he has

got together various definitions of his subject: Modesty, according to Montesquieu, Vaugelas, Montaigne, and so forth. Then he enumerates the origins of that sense, according to his view of them.

"Shame or modesty is due to Nature which, in man as in all other vertebrates, has mixed up the organs which are used in generation with others which serve purposes even more necessary, but of too unpleasant a character to be performed in public.

"Even some animals, cats for example, seem to be ashamed of such acts.

"This uniting of functions has led some men, such as Jean Jacques Rousseau, to associate the idea of voluptuousness with all the regions circumjacent to these organs. But Jean Jacques flattered himself when he thought he was unique in so thinking.

"This unfortunate quality has given rise to great perplexity in the mind of the semi-intelligent being we call man. And those very organs which have been pronounced

divine have also been proclaimed shameful."

A second character here observes:

"You only look on one aspect of that feeling of shame. And if that was the whole of the matter, the sense of modesty would not exist among primitive civilizations; and yet we see that it does so exist. We know likewise that peasant women are far more loth than town-bred women to expose themselves to a doctor, even when it is a matter of life and death."

This disputant said he thought he could discern a rudimentary sense of shame even among the most uncouth of savages, and he stated that, in his opinion:

"The real and most powerful cause of modesty is that it is a terribly dangerous thing carelessly to excite the most violent instincts of men."

That is not the whole of the matter.

"There are other reasons.

"In all countries where it is not the custom to go naked and in which there is not

community of ownership in women, the jealousy of the male does not permit his property to be used or even looked upon by another. But whether the whole woman, or only a part of her, is concealed depends on the particular country.

"So jealousy finds a useful ally in modesty."

Modesty is thus the outcome of a failing with which the majority of men are afflicted.

"Few people are alive to beauty of form."

"Many are sensitive to deformity."

"Women . . . who reveal their nakedness in some unapproved manner are hissed without mercy. I remember being at a theatre, during the performance of a play by Hervé, and seeing a pretty girl whose skirt accidently came off on the stage. She was furiously booed. It was borne in upon me by the uproar, that few of the audience were as grateful to her as I was for the charming but involuntary display to which she treated us."

"The fear of being an object of ridicule is one of the reasons of modesty, that is to say, of veiling the body. It is a reason admirably illustrated by Tabarin. Tabarin asks his master Mondor what he would do 'if he wanted to get a woman to pass through Paris stark naked, without making her a laughing stock.' Mondor fails to discover the solution. It's simple enough, but somewhat delicate, as you will see if you look up the little volume entitled *The Farces of Tabarin*."

Christianity also had its influence on modesty.

"Christianity, being based on hatred and fear of the flesh, pushed the demands of modesty so far that they reached the point of deformity, indecency and uncleanness. Christianity did not invent modesty."

And a quotation from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* showed that the ancients were not unacquainted with modesty, for "Polyxena when dying took care to fall with decency."

"Two opposing reasons incite a woman to

modesty. She hides the seat of her infirmities, the canal of her impurities; and she hides the flower of her beauty, the flower of her body. In either case she is right."

Few women realize the charm of nudity.

"They think that dress makes them attractive. Men have been persuaded to think so too. By a sort of general perversion veils have become incitements to desire. Thus by a sort of eddy, or reaction, those precautions which among primitive peoples annulled desire, now sting it into activity."

"The figures of most women being imperfect, modesty serves them in good stead."

"But, in point of fact, the best-looking women, when they are not fools, are the most free in displaying their figure. That is apparent when they are alone among themselves."

With regard to masculine modesty:

"We are not so strict about nudity in men, whether in art or in real life. That is because women are less easily excited. There is not so much risk in putting a woman

in a frenzy of desire by letting her catch a glimpse of what she shouldn't (according to Montaigne)."

"One would think a man would be less bashful than a woman. Nature compels him to be as much and even more so . . . being more noticeable, more conspicuous and liable to be altogether too demonstrative."

Be it added that, in conversation, Anatole France, speaking of modesty in general, gave it a reason which he did not repeat in his notes. He used to say, "Man has cast a mantle of shame over the spectacle of love because he does not like appearing in an inferior posture, and also because he is mortified at not taking part in it himself."

Finally, among the materials for this Dialogue is the sketch of a comparison between the morality of men and women and the morality of flowers.

"Plants, on the other hand, display with pride . . . what man conceals.

"In the case of many of them, the organ of love is all scent and colour.

"There are perhaps in the vegetable world species as perfect as man, but their morals are not ours."

CHAPTER IX

THE DIALOGUE CONCERNING WAR

HE notes for the Discussion of War date from the war itself.

To begin with, there is the following piece of dialogue:

"I take sides with the Socialists. For the Socialists, of whatever nationality, the war was a trial to which they had to submit. But they were not so inhuman, not so ferocious as the rest. In every country, taking them as a whole, they were less bellicose. When they were bellicose it was mainly through fear or motives of self-interest. I would rather have a man made cruel by fear than one of the other sort, for when he has nothing more to be afraid of, he becomes gentle again. And especially do I take sides with the Confédération Générale du Travail, which to my mind, seems to have attained a more than ordinary degree of civ-

ilization. We look to the Confédération Générale du Travail to give us the United States of the World, to put an end to the era of international warfare. . . ."

"And to substitute civil, for foreign, war. That will be what your progress will amount to, when you have got the whole world forming one single State."

"Enormous progress too. Civil war is not so detestable as war with a foreign foe. We at least know what we are fighting for."

We see that Anatole France gives his opponents plenty of rope. Here is another example. No one doubts his approval of the *Internationale Ouvrière*. That did not prevent him from urging counter arguments.

It was a way he had, thus to go round examining and taking stock of ideas, persons and things. He looked at every aspect of a question, even though he had already made up his mind to abide by one of them, and had definitely taken his stand. He had a habit of thinking aloud. He would be

alternately indulgent and critical about the same thing. That is what some of his critics could not, or would not, understand. By emphasizing the severe side of him at the expense of the kindly side, they have betrayed his confidence and wronged his memory.

"The *Internationale Ouvrière* is distinguished by intelligence, fairness of view, prudence and sound sense."

"But, all the same, it is an organization which from its very constitution and composition is bound, in its outlook upon industrial things, to study the operative and the operative's point of view, rather than the aims and policy of the undertaking itself."

"When it comes to take into its purview all those questions which now exclusively occupy the directorate, in addition to concerning itself with labour questions, the *Internationale Ouvrière* will necessarily be split up into sections. Will not these sections come to look on questions of finding markets, on colonial problems, and in fact

on all those questions which engender war, pretty much as a German, French or British manufacturer would look upon them? And if they solve them along the same lines as the directors they replace, they will be just as warlike."

Two shorter notes take stock of two further objections of the same order:

"What means will these sections possess for settling quarrels by arbitration?

"When the armies are suppressed, won't they be re-established under the disguise of police forces?"

Anatole France often cried out against the inexcusable prolongation of the war. This dragging out of hostilities he judged more criminal than the war itself. It prompted him to write that ironic passage, penned towards the end of the fighting, a passage which he intended to include in the *Discussion concerning War.*

"We are easier in our minds at Tours. We are not afraid now that the war is going to finish up all of a sudden. Nevertheless,

the weakness of the Central Empires is disturbing. Turkey has ceased to fight. Her troops are giving in. Her Pashas are selling themselves for money. Austria is surrendering unconditionally, and is begging her adversaries to come and take her. She is still pouring forth prayers; but even now she has ceased to exist. She is broken in pieces, and no one knows which particular piece of her is breathing forth these supplications to her conquerors. Germany is not quite so weak, and her resistance is encouraging; but she may come crashing down any day and she makes no secret about it. And then peace might break out."

"To avert that peril I put forward a proposal which is perhaps a bold one, but which will command the approval of all patriots. I wish to bring it before our Government. I demand that, with all due circumspection, the Allies should provide the Germans, Austrians and Turks with the means necessary to enable them to continue the war,—munitions, money and even men.

The Allies have plenty of blacks at their disposal; they could easily divert some of them in favour of their unfortunate adversaries. In this manner the danger of peace might be averted for a considerable period."

"Of course it would be necessary to ensure that the subsidies so granted should be used by the Central Powers for continuing the war and not for securing victory. That would be merely a question of calculating the right amount of help to be given. As to their willingness to accept, there is no room for doubt. They also have their war industries."

An additional note draws attention to the necessity of seeing to it that the enemy countries should not have any Revolutions.

"The English, who have their wits about them, will see that the Kaiser is kept on his throne."

Then follow some more reflections about the war, all included in the same little sheaf of notes.

"In Europe and throughout the world the

war has been conspicuous for bringing with it countless benefits; but of these, economic prosperity is the most noteworthy. It has multiplied wealth and created an admirable financial situation by paying the workers in paper and the soldiers in glory."

"By a liberal use of banknotes the various Governments have ensured the welfare of the greatest number and made all hearts easy."

"The war has facilitated the Government's task by suppressing all forms of freedom. It has entombed in silence the mistakes of the rulers and military leaders and smothered all complaints."

"Some deeds which we ourselves take a pride in, become infamous when they are wrought by the enemy."

"Thus the same actions are called by different names according to whether they are accomplished by us or by our foes."

"To love war because it makes heroes, is like loving the croup because doctors and

nurses have died in trying to save the life of a child."

Then there are some notes concerning the "lame peace" (*paix boîteuse*). They give some equivalents, "patched up peace," "pinchbeck peace." Examples: "The peace of Longjumeau, concluded between the Catholics and the Protestants, 1568, after the battle of St. Denis." Part of the Dialogue was to refer to the "lame peace," and it was, further, to be made the occasion for a quotation, as the following isolated entry will show:

"Nevertheless the lame peace inspired a passage which I will read to you (quote letter to R. . . .)."

This letter was circulated "under the rose." Several different versions of it have been published. It was written by Anatole France in 1917. It is here given as it appears in a copy which he sent to one of his friends and which bears these words:

"Here is a letter which I have had copied for you, as I thought it would amuse you. Show it to those who think as we do, if there are any such people . . . A. F."

It is hardly necessary to mention that the addressee was a highly orthodox person.

"CHER AMI,

"I augur from your letter that you are in good health, for it is a sturdy epistle and reveals a resolute spirit. It appears that we can make what terms of peace we like, and that it is merely a question of time, otherwise the Allies would not have dictated the conditions in advance, and you would not have confirmed them in your letter. Well, then, seeing that it is open to us to make peace with or without victory, as we choose, I, following your example, indignantly repel the idea of a peace without victory.

"Can there be any satisfaction in a peace without victory?

"A peace without victory is bread without leaven, jugged hare without wine, mullet without capers, *cèpes* without garlic, love without quarrels, a camel without a hump, night without a moon, a chimney without smoke, a town without a brothel, pork without salt, a pearl without a hole, a rose

without scent, a republic without dilapidations, a leg of mutton without a knuckle, a cat without fur, chitterlings without mustard—in a word, 'tis an insipid thing. Is it possible that when there are so many sorts of peace to choose from, those Socialists, with such an abundant assortment before them, should go and put their hands on a peace without victory, a ramshackle peace, to employ your own original and powerful expression? Nay, what do I say, not even a limping, halting, hobbling peace, but a legless peace which will go and squat one buttock on each party, a disgusting, fœtid, ignominious, obscene, excrementitious, fistulous, hemorrhoidal peace, or in one single word, a peace without victory.

"But what can we expect from rascals who would put a tax on incomes and make the rich pay their share? And that is why, in the article which you annex to your letter by way of voucher, *le Temps* has so relentlessly pilloried these enemies of the human race. One is conscious of a stern delight in reading it. The indignation of righteous men is beautiful and terrible to behold.

"Oh, dear R. . . ., how praiseworthy is this good taste of yours which makes you choose a well-made, perfectly formed, plump, fully developed peace, a peace that brings us honour and profit, in

short, a victorious peace. True this nice peace may keep us waiting for it some time yet. But we are in no hurry. The war is only costing France ten thousand men a day!"

It is by no means my wish to reopen pro-war and anti-war controversy. That is a matter of which posterity will judge.

Moreover, some of the more fanatical opponents of Anatole France, confounding the glorification of war with bravery, and the detestation of war with cowardice, have descended so low into the mire of abuse that we will not soil our fingers by handling any specimens of their vituperative garbage.

Nevertheless, I feel that I must correct a few of the more glaring misconceptions that have gained currency concerning the attitude taken up by Anatole France during the war.

He had always hated war. Of course he was too profound a historian, too familiar with the history of the world as a whole, not to realize that, during prolonged periods in the past, the state of war had been the

normal state. In such times, war and progress went necessarily hand in hand. Concerning the Middle Ages he wrote, "In those days a warlike society was the only one conceivable. All the resources of the different nations were directed towards maintaining it." And when, in a speech delivered in 1905, he was addressing certain partisans of peace, he did not conceal from them that, although war might one day become a thing of the past, it had for a long period in the world's history been one of the indispensable conditions of national existence. "A new order of things, new scientific discoveries, new economic necessities, will impose the pacific state on men, just as, heretofore, the very conditions of their existence placed them and maintained them in a state of war."

But though he hated war, he knew quite well that it was not dead. He saw it approaching. "It will not be given to us, even to the youngest of us, to see the close of the era of arms," he wrote in *The White*

Stone, which was published in 1907. In the same book occur these singularly prophetic statements concerning the character of the coming conflict: "Industrial violence engenders military violence. . . . Trade rivalries kindle international hatreds that can only be quenched in blood. Like the feudal state, the capitalist state is bound up with war. Under the existing régime of nationalist production it is the guns that fix tariffs, set up customs-barriers, open and close markets. A war of extermination must inevitably ensue from the economic conditions which control the civilized world to-day." It will therefore be seen that, far from entertaining a desire to weaken an arm of defence that was still so indispensable, he took his stand side by side with Jaurès who, with all the passionate eagerness of his nature, was vainly appealing to his ideal of a nation in arms, an ideal which, when war did come, was actually brought to pass.

For, if Anatole France detested war, he dearly loved his country. What a gross

perversion of the truth it is to say that pacificism and patriotism are irreconcilable, that they cannot both find a home in the same heart. No one was more closely attached than he to his native soil by tender yet indissoluble bonds of heart and mind. No one was in closer communion with the vanished generations, their history, their toils, their sorrows and their joys, whereto ancient buildings and historic sites bear eloquent and silent witness. And this profound attachment he expressed in many a page of incomparable beauty scattered up and down his books, and all of them informed with exquisite and subtle tenderness.

Hearken to what he said concerning love of country, when he was in the very thick of his Socialist campaign. "There must be created for the people, and by the people, a mutual love of country. Let us preserve, respect and uphold those national organizations which, in the present stage of human evolution, are the necessary forces of social

life. Let us remember that the disintegration of the free peoples, the downfall of the intellectual nations would, far from paving the way for the union of free nations, soon subject the Latin races of Europe to the domination of a barbarian autocracy. The free nations must enter, not dead, but living, into the world-wide Federation. When that day dawns, may it shine on a France that has lost neither her power nor the memory of what she was; neither her power nor her genius. May it behold her standing firm, her brow encircled with the crown of olive, proud of being a good worker, and only striving not to be outstripped by any of her sisters in the ascent to the shining peaks of concord and of peace."

Similarly, though he detested war, he honoured the Army. Nor are these two sentiments mutually exclusive. Those who would accuse him of entertaining inconsistent ideas, and those who would convict him of being a reactionary, alike make a point of quoting his preface to *Faust* (1889)

in which he belauds the military virtues. But such people forget the influence that Alfred de Vigny exerted on Anatole France and his generation—Alfred de Vigny and his conception of the Army as a chosen body of devoted souls, isolated from their fellows, "a monastery on the march," a school of self-denial, austerity, bravery and honour. No one in those days contemplated the possibility of the spectacle with which the Great War was to familiarize us, to wit, the regular army and the territorial reserve, both officers and men, standing side by side and confronting the same perils. In those days, the defence of the country was in the hands of the professional army alone. And this idea of things clung so closely to Anatole France that when he wanted to praise Colonel Picquart he compared him to "one of those soldiers whom Alfred de Vigny had seen or imagined, calm heroes of the daily round who invest the performance of the humblest duties with the nobility that is within them, and for whom the fulfilment of

their routine tasks constitutes the poetry of daily life."

The Dreyfus case, which was to have so important an effect in crystallizing Anatole France's convictions, did nothing to modify his attitude towards the Army. Now that a quarter of a century has flowed over those tragic events, one truth about the matter should be brought out into the light, and that is that many people who espoused the cause of Dreyfus, did so without the least intention of damaging the prestige of the Army. The contrary, indeed, was the case. By disclosing the identity of the parcel of ornamental quill-drivers who committed, and then hushed up, that gigantic miscarriage of justice, they exonerated the great body of officers from all suspicion of complicity. That was certainly what was in the mind of Anatole France when he indicated, with a few masterly strokes of the pen, the narrow area within which those criminals pursued their nefarious activities. "It is indeed a fact that, at the far end of a

passage in a Government office, on a few square feet of waxed floor, a handful of gold-braided bureaucrats, some of them supine and double-faced, others restless and turbulent, did with their mendacious and misleading forgeries, succeed in defeating justice and hoodwinking a great nation."

Even while the war was in progress he did not fail to express his loathing of war. But, at the very outset, an incident occurred that warned him that he must no longer give overt expression to his thoughts. To the end of his days, he would often tell his friends about it. Every one is aware how, imbued as he was with the Latin spirit, he admired Rome and all things Roman, and especially the Roman conception of peace with victory; he was fond of repeating the formula of that *Pax Romana* which they at length imposed on the entire world: "They desired that their vanquished foes should become their friends." In a statement he made to the newspapers, during the early months of the war, he simply adapted

that phrase as follows: "Our victory shall not be stained with crime. . . . We will proclaim that the French people will admit the vanquished foe to their friendship." Popular passions were then everywhere so frenzied and so blind, that he was straightway overwhelmed with innumerable letters of the most virulent abuse. To attest his loyal citizenship and to give a concrete form to his protestations, he offered himself for military service. He was seventy years of age, and his offer was not accepted.

Thus so far from contradicting his principles he had remained perfectly true to himself, though the malevolence of his adversaries distorted the incident in a variety of ways. He himself publicly declared in an article written towards the end of his life: "At the beginning of the war, I penned, on the need for a prompt and humane peace, a passage which does me honour, and for which I was overwhelmed with abuse."

Since his death, certain self-advertising patriots have taken it upon themselves to

blame that generous and clear-sighted expression of hope that there would be a reconciliation when the victory had been won; but, unlike his calumniators of 1914, they cannot plead, as their excuse, that the whole world had gone mad.

No man who had no near and dear one to tremble for was more oppressed than he by the interminable catastrophe. All the sufferings it involved were present to his mind, and we know how rarely such altruism, such sensitiveness to the sufferings of others, are manifested by old people.

The fact is that everything connected with this war pierced him to the quick. He who had a great human heart, if ever a man had, for a moment despaired of humanity. True, he had always proclaimed that the age of violence was not yet over, and that before reaching the era of peace mankind would wage many another war. But now the question he began to ask himself was, would they ever cease fighting at all?

His horror and indignation increased in

proportion as he discerned behind the official version of things, a version which was altogether too cut and dried, the complex causes of the conflict, namely, those great commercial rivalries which he had denounced ten years before.

His horror and indignation increased when he thought of all the people, and groups of people, who had "made a good thing" out of the war, of all those people who wanted the catastrophe to go on indefinitely because it brought them profit.

Indeed, it was this inexcusable prolongation of the war that pained him more than anything. That, in his eyes, was the unpardonable sin. It is no exaggeration to say that for four whole years, while every day added to his weight of sorrow, he implored peace to hasten its coming. He kept his eyes on the alert for the faintest signs of it; and every time such signs faded once more into nothingness, he was overwhelmed with disappointment. He said that sometimes he thought his reason would give way.

But, alas. what could he do to curtail the massacre, in which a thousand young Frenchmen perished each day?

He wrote to all his influential friends, even to those who had cast their vote for the war, and begged them to hurry on peace.

He almost persuaded the manager of a great orthodox journal to put another paper into circulation and so afford at least one medium through which the voice of reason might make itself heard. The project come to naught.

At one time, in a moment of desperation, he contemplated the idea of writing an open letter to the President of the Republic. But he reflected that no journal could print it, no publisher could put it in circulation; the Censor reigned supreme.

Should he then seek voluntary exile so as to be free to write what he would? But never a line of his would appear in France. No, no, when a war is in progress, a writer must needs be content with being a pacifist in theory, since the Censor will take care to

employ all the abundant means at his disposal to prevent his being a pacifist in practice. For the very *raison d'être* of the censorship is nothing more or less than to see that not a line appears in print against the war.

And this was what Clemenceau said to a friend of his who was also a friend of Anatole France, though the latter knew nothing of it till after the war: "I admire him. But if he says a word too much, I'll have him arrested."

At last the Armistice came. The slaughter stopped. Had Anatole France ceased to be a pacifist? Not he. A passage evidently written just after the war, and apparently hitherto unpublished, shows that he still cherished the hope and expectation of the coming of universal peace.

"In a word, white or yellow, every nation deems itself the greatest in the world. Every nation has a taste for war and delights in carnage. When the carnage is organized it is called war, and is held to be the

finest, the noblest and the most profitable occupation in the world."

"But are we therefore to say that it will always be thus, and that universal peace will never come to pass? Since its remote beginnings, humanity has passed through so many phases that we cannot assume that the present one, in which one power is set up against another, will endure for ever. And we may entertain the hope that, following the successive associations which formed the family, the tribe, the nation, mankind will at length be joined together in the United States of the World. In some distant future, America or Japan will decide that matter, if, as Monsieur Couchoud gives us to understand, the world must one day be either American or Japanese."

"Meanwhile let us make the coming of Peace the great desire of our hearts. Let us desire it, because desire is the creative force, the sole creative force throughout the universe. Let us write and write again the name of Peace, because, after all, those

Scandinavians of old, in believing in the virtue of runes, had a vague instinct of the power of ideas, and a word traced on a wind-tossed leaf may change the fate of the world."

Gradually the censorship relaxed its stringency, and Anatole France never wearied of proclaiming his detestation of war and his faith in the future. Addressing the Congress of Teachers assembled at Tours in August 1919, he "opened his heart" and said:

"In moulding the child, you will be shaping the edifice of the future. What a task is that at this crisis of our history, when the world is crumbling to pieces around us, when the old social structures are collapsing beneath the weight of their own misdeeds, and when victors and vanquished are sinking down side by side into a common slough of misery gazing at each other with looks of mutual abhorrence!

"It will be the teacher's duty to imbue the child with a love of peace and of the works

of peace. He will instil into its heart a hatred of war. He will banish from his precepts everything that excites hatred of the foreigner, even hatred of our foes of yesterday, not that we must show indulgence to crime and absolve all those who are guilty, but because in any nation the number of the victims of wrongdoing exceeds the number of those who perpetrate it.

"My friends, see to it that hate is hated."

Have we not here an echo of the famous sentiment of which Victor Hugo delivered himself half a century ago, on the morrow of the Franco-Prussian war, when he cried, "Let us dishonour war"?

And henceforth, on every occasion, he marked his hatred of hate. In the album of a feminine admirer he wrote, in 1921:

"War is a crime, for which victory brings no atonement."

In innumerable conversations—even in the presence of the Swedish Minister who, on behalf of his sovereign, invited Anatole France to receive the Nobel Prize at Stock-

holm—and in the few articles that now issued from his pen, he indignantly denounced the part played by the industrial magnates of every country in modern conflicts. "Men think they die for their country; in reality they die for the manufacturers."

In 1923 he addressed a pathetic appeal to the American women who came "to take part in the restoration of our war-stricken provinces."

"Mesdames," he said to them, "I am given to understand that you will not reject the greeting of an old man who, after having espoused all the political errors of his time, has come, at the close of his days, to see that truth resides in government by the people for the people.

"You come from a country that is both industrious and rich to a land oppressed by a tragic glory, a country which suffers from the burden more cruelly than its pride will permit it to avow.

"You are, indeed, welcome. But repair-

ing the ravages of war is not the only task. You are women, and women are more courageous than men."

"Be the saviours of humanity.

"Be it your task to attack the monster that devours our race; yours to make war on war, a war to the death.

"From this time forward, hate war with quenchless hatred.

"Hate it as you contemplate its wrongs; hate it when you see it adorned with the pomps of triumph, with the palms of victory.

"Let your hatred of it be a mortal hatred. Slay it!"

"O women! O mothers! Our grandchildren shall behold the United States of Europe, they shall see the Universal Republic.

"O great-hearted women, make your way through the world with these sentiments in your hearts and you will save Europe, and bring happiness to all the Earth!"

At the same time he was scared at the

instability of the peace. He appealed for a true League of Nations, for a United Europe. When in Sweden, he gave utterance to these forceful words: "The most horrible of wars was followed by a treaty which was not a treaty of peace but the prolongation of the war. It will spell the ruin of Europe unless, at long last, she finds a place for reason in her deliberations."

Many of his last utterances concluded with this prayer: "May we be good Europeans!"

Four months before his death and on the last occasion on which he appeared in public —it was at the Trocadéro where celebrations were being held in honour of his eightieth birthday—he made an effort to say a word in response to every speech. Wasted and even then as pale as marble, but very upright, he stood at the edge of his box, and with all the force at his command, he said, "Let us make peace. If not, we shall not be forgiven."

About the same time, that is to say, in

May 1924, he formed the plan of publishing everything he had written about the war. He entrusted one of his young friends, Jacques Lion, with the task of getting together the scattered material. He proposed to set aside anything which did not square with his present views. Some articles, for example, written at the beginning of the war were, it is true, set down in indignation and horror, but also in ignorance. How many men have, little by little, ceased to look at the war under the same aspect as they beheld it in the early days, and how many, when they had freed themselves from the universal delirium that affected the judgment of all men alike, have come to smile a bitter smile at their credulity? How many, in their hour of disillusionment, have sadly revised their opinions in the inner chamber of their consciences? Of such passages, sometimes written in aid of charity, he now expressed his disapproval. A year before his death he wrote and published the following: "I even suffered myself to

make little speeches to the soldiers, living and dead, and I regret it as the worst action of my life."

When in the month of August he had taken to his bed and felt that his end was at hand, he once again gave clear instructions on this matter, in the presence of his wife and grandson. He mentioned the things he wanted suppressed, he indicated the order in which the remainder was to be arranged. And of this be made a special point—it was the last thing he said about the war: "We must conclude by showing that the crowning infamy of the war was its wilful prolongation."

CHAPTER X

CONCERNING THE DIALOGUE ON ASTRONOMY

HE Talk on Astronomy was the last work on which Anatole France was engaged. He was at work upon it under the lime trees in his garden at la Béchellerie in July 1924, just three months before his death. He was then reading a book by M. Alphonse Berget entitled *le Ciel.*

Of this Dialogue scarcely anything exists but some very abundant notes. These notes on Astronomy are made with patient care, and cover at least a score of sheets of different dates and sizes.

Anatole France had set forth the characteristics of each of these planets "which the genius of man has weighed and measured," its dimensions compared with the Earth, the duration of its day and year, the number

of its satellites, the nature of its atmosphere, its distance from the Sun, the heat and light derived from it. Thus Mars, Venus, Neptune, Uranus, etc., have each their dockets. The Sun is included also, "enaureoled by a crown of hydrogen." As to the stars, he had classified them successively according to their brilliance, their speed, and their distance from the Earth. And he set out the bewildering figures: the nearest star, Alpha of the Centaur, was eight trillions of leagues away, eight thousand times farther off than Neptune.

Occasionally, in the margin of this dry array of facts, he inscribed a little commentary inspired, perhaps, by a book he was reading, or by his own reflections or recollections. Although the heavenly phenomena were familiar to him, he was always astonished "to behold the stars, not as they are, but as they were when the luminous ray which we now behold started on its journey." The star which appears to scintillate before our eyes may have ceased

to exist a thousand years ago if light takes a thousand years to traverse the distance which separates us from that star. And he grumbled at those cruel inclinations of the planetary axes which expose us to the successive changes of the seasons.

When he was studying the birth of the worlds, he noted that the spiral Nebula of the Hounds was "the most ancient witness of the existence of matter." He once more put the old question to himself, the question whether life on this earth of ours is not an accidental phenomenon, a sort of mildew, and whether "we ourselves are not the product of some unwholesome decomposition." He tried to form an estimate of the time that had elapsed from the formation of the Earth down to the appearance upon its surface of organic matter "in which we do not see life but which perhaps *is* life."

Then he came to the inevitable cooling of the Sun, he considered the hypothesis which, according to those who advance it, would postpone the diminution of its power, and

which foretells that planets will fall on to the Sun and restore its vigour, as in the fable of the Earth and Helios.

Over and above these notes, however, we find the log of one of those voyages he so loved to undertake "across the solitudes of frozen ether." He described, as he passed on his way, the physiognomy of each planet. He showed the whole of our solar system speeding towards the constellation of Hercules. Then, crossing those frontiers "which our sight, armed with glasses and directed by abstruse calculations is unable to pierce," he penetrated into those infinite depths within which stars are forever dying and coming to birth.

"The heavens," he said in conclusion, "which human science explores, are not lapped in tranquillity. They are the theatre of scenes of death, or unimaginable catastrophes, and they, too, bring forth in travail."

And, then, at the head of a big white sheet appears the following title and sentence:

"The Star"

"The morning star was awakening in the paling sky. . . ."

Was this the beginning of the final version of this supreme symposium?

Like Monsieur Bergeret, Anatole France was "fond of amusing himself with the wonders of Astronomy"; and Astronomy frequently occurs in his books. His *Garden of Epicurus* begins with a stately allusion to the starry hosts; and in *Life and Letters* the works of Camille Flammarion inspire him with his "Astronomical Day-Dreams." In *The White Stone* he summarizes Blanqui's daring theory concerning the identity of the worlds. And every one will remember that passage from *The Amethyst Ring* in which Monsieur Bergeret, although he had recently expressed his hope that the celestial realms were uninhabited, "peoples the universe with seductive forms, and, with thoughts sublime, fills up the void

of Heaven's abysses," all because he had just been appointed to a professorial chair.

This same interested curiosity also revealed itself in his conversation. He used to say that the prodigious size of a star like Antarès, compared with the Sun, filled him with a sense of tragedy; and though he never betrayed the slightest fear of death, he confessed his regret at being obliged to disappear before it was discovered whether the planets were inhabited or not. He always cherished the hope that Astronomy would be given a foremost place in elementary education. And he often expressed his astonishment—though he himself supplied the explanation—that the wonders of Astronomy, which had been spread abroad in the world for some two centuries, had not yet taken hold of men's minds, battered down the walls of the old-fashioned religious cosmogony, and, by so doing, modified man's ethical ideas.

But he was also keenly interested in other sciences. Architecture was, of course, a

natural concomitant of his love of Antiquity. He could not tear himself away from the contemplation of ancient ruins. He wanted to have the bed of the Tiber excavated. "It is simply paved with Roman statues perfectly preserved in the mud. People throw away millions and millions on war, and have no money to spend on digging up treasures of art."

Geology, palæontology, had a similar attraction for him. His books contain frequent references to the antediluvian *fauna;* and he also wanted people to get hold of the geological idea of "present causes," that is to say, the imperceptible progress of the mighty changes that have taken place in the course of the ages on the Earth's surface.

But it was not only the science of the past that excited his curiosity. He was interested in Botany for example, because he loved flowers and understood them. In *Penguin Island* he has sung the wonder of their amours. He explained how important a thing for them was Love. "For flowers,"

he says, "Love, the reproduction of the species, is the great thing. A plant is stationary, it has not an animal's means of defence, for an animal can take to flight; therefore its primary preoccupation is to ensure the continuance of its species. The whole flower is made for love."

He also kept himself *au courant* with medical matters. Although he was little given to reading periodicals, he took in a certain medical Review till the end of his life.

New scientific theories never left him indifferent. In a letter he wrote in 1922, he says, "I am reading with interest a book on Einstein, in which the ideas of that scientist are explained without reference to mathematics."

Recent mechanical discoveries also engaged his attention and he realized their effect. Over and over again, he foretold in his books the important part that machinery would play in the society of the future. One day he observed that Sherlock Holmes

knew nothing about motor-cars, telephones and wireless telegraphy, and that if Conan Doyle placed them at his hero's service, he could give him an entirely new set of adventures. Is it generally known that Anatole France was one of the first to go up in an aeroplane, and that at a time when to do so was still looked on as something of an exploit? He had for his pilot one of the pioneers of aviation, Henry Farman. Talking about this incident, he used to say, "He warned me that the landing would be sudden. But in this he exhibited no less delicacy than skill, because when he spoke we had already come to earth without my having so much as noticed it." A few months before his death, he had firmly made up his mind to go to Brussels and London by aeroplane.

It may be objected that these minor details add nothing to our idea of Anatole France, even if they do not actually detract from it. I deem, on the contrary, that they reveal him in an unfamiliar aspect. They

show that so far from being shut up in his art or in any one period, he was much more accessible to the modern spirit and to scientific progress than is generally supposed; they prove that he kept in close touch with life, with the whole of life, and that no department of knowledge failed to interest him. In fact, he recognized the necessity for an alliance between Science and Letters, and as he says in *The Bloom of Life*, "Science divorced from Letters remains mechanical and dull, and Letters divorced from Science are empty and hollow, for Science is the substance of Letters.

CHAPTER XI

PLANS AND PROJECTS

"THE CYCLOPS"

IT was towards the end of 1919 that Anatole France conceived the idea of writing a novel to be entitled *The Cyclops*—a tragi-comic satire on humanity after the style of *The Revolt of the Angels* and *Penguin Island*.

The few notes which he left behind give a better idea of the form the book was to take than was afforded by his talk. For, as I have said before, he never said very much either about himself or his books. "I'm not interested in myself," he used to say, and in one of his books he observes, "I have always endeavoured not to know myself. . . . I have always lived as far away from myself as possible."

The action was to take place in the fu-

ture. A yacht is wrecked on the coast of Sicily. The passengers are saved. One of them thinks he sees "a giant seated on one of the mountain-peaks." At first they tell him it is nonsense. But then some one else shouts out, "I recognize the giant. It's a Cyclops."

"How comes it that they find a Cyclops in Trinacria, just as in the fabulous times? The explanation is that the Cyclopes, who had disappeared before civilization, reappear now that war has plunged the world back again into barbarism."

This story is confirmed in a second note.

"Cyclopes anterior and posterior to civilization. Sicily had gone back to its pre-Homeric state when the yacht was shipwrecked."

What is the date of this shipwreck? It comes out in a sketch of a conversation in which the shipwrecked people talk about the Cyclops. The one who thought he had seen a giant sitting on a mountain-top drew upon himself this reply:

"You have been taken in by a trick of Nature. It is a crag. In the same way people once thought they saw the head of Napoleon on a mountainous island. It was close down on the summit and was wearing the famous little hat. But now, when twenty centuries have passed over the ashes of Napoleon, his image has faded from men's minds and travellers behold it no more above the island peaks."

Thus the shipwreck took place twenty centuries after Napoleon's death, and at that period the Cyclopes had appeared again in Sicily. What made they there? Alas, they made war. That is evident from the following outline of the novel (by "Act" understand "Part") :

Act I

"The shipwrecked folk."

"The Satyrs."

"Philosophic Dialogue."

"Polyphemus, son of Poseidon and the nymph Thoosa."

Polyphemus, who is blind, is at war with the other Cyclopes (perhaps Ulysses and Polyphemus . . . put back into the past).

ACT II

"Mobilization."
"Philosophic Dialogue."
"The Satyrs, mobilized."

ACT III

"Polyphemus deems himself the victor."

ACT IV

"Defeat of Polyphemus."

Apart from these two scanty documents, we find some notes concerning the divers regions which mythology assigns as the home of the Cyclopes; two or three passages from the *Odyssey* relating to Ulysses' arrival in the Land of the Cyclopes, and, finally, some information regarding the tonnage, dimensions and the fittings of the yacht. These are the sole surviving traces of *The Cyclops*.

Anatole France had long entertained the hope of bringing this novel into being. In June 1921, when he had finished *The Bloom of Life*, we find him writing as follows to one of his friends who was anxious to know what plans he had in view: "I have finished the book about the memories of my young days. I should like to commit myself to a more serious task, under the guise and outward semblance of a piece of burlesque."

In the November of that same year he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature; and on that occasion he was interviewed by certain journalists to whom he made known his intention to write a book against war. He expatiated on the advantages of making use of allegory for a work of that nature. "I want," said he, "to write this book in such a manner as will offend the susceptibilities of the least possible number of people, the least possible number of marshals, nay, of corporals. So I am going to give it an allegorical form, as I did for *Penguin Island*. Fables have this advantage, they enable a

writer to present truth with the minimum of harshness and the maximum of effectiveness. Rabelais would have been burnt alive if he had not used allegory. Pierre Chaine was able to say all manner of things by putting them in the mouth of an animal clad in blue. I should like to slaughter lies without wounding men." And he said again, in this connection: "In fiction, it is true, blows are inclined to glance off a little, but you can hit ever so much harder."

The following summer, we find him again making humorous reference, and still à propos of *The Cyclops*, to the advantages of allegory. "At my age, we either lose our memory, or else we remain in ignorance of new customs, and so there are many advantages in writing an allegorical story. In fiction everything is permitted. If I perpetrate solecisms, if I make people dine at seven o'clock, no one will be able to find fault, for the whole thing is fantasy."

Then again, when he reluctantly confessed to a preference among his books, it

soon became evident that that preference was directed to the books in which he set forth his opinions, to those "in which he had been able to express his convictions, to say what he thought."

And so *The Cyclops*, which was to be at once "a book of opinions" and, that most seductive thing, an allegory, was in every way an enterprise to tempt him. But the months went by and he kept on putting it off. In defence he spoke of his age.

"I'm too old. Look at Van Dongen's portrait of me."

A NOVEL ON NAPOLEON

For a very long time, Anatole France had been projecting a novel on Napoleon: a little novel he put it modestly. The incident with which he proposed to deal was, it is true, sufficiently slight. But what would he not have made of it!

Napoleon has left Elba. He has disembarked at Golfe Juan and is making his way towards Paris. In the neighbourhood of

Grenoble, he halts at the château of one of his supporters, a rich Dauphiny landlord. Be it noted, by the way, that the owner of the château is out shooting, and that when he comes back, Napoleon says to him, banteringly, "Well, you didn't expect to find *me* here!"

But the hostess ill-conceals the anxiety she feels about another matter, an anxiety which she forthwith communicates to her husband—their little daughter has just developed measles. And now one can see the cunning irony of the situation. For the father, for the mother, for the whole household, this attack of measles is what occupies their thoughts to the exclusion of everything else, completely throwing into the shade the Emperor's return and his presence there, and all the mighty events which were then brewing and were shortly to shake the world.

Anatole France had made a point of visiting the Golfe Juan and Grenoble. He had, he said, collected together at la Béchellerie, two hundred volumes concerning the Em-

peror's sojourn on the Isle of Elba and his return to France. It is well known that he was always anxious to learn whatever he could about Napoleon, the man. It is even stated that his reading of works on the early days of Napoleon led Anatole France to make a careful study of the Revolution and, in consequence, to write *The Gods are Athirst.*

After the war, he thought no more about writing his book on the Escape from Elba.

PIÉDAGNEL

Firmin Piédagnel is a character of wholly secondary importance in *The Elm Tree on the Mall*, in which he only appears quite at the beginning. He is the son of an invalid shoemaker, who has a shop under the shadow of the Church of Saint-Exupère. He was the most brilliant pupil at the High Seminary; its adornment and its pride. But he had neither the instinct for theology nor the vocation for the priesthood. From the teaching at the Seminary he had only ac-

quired the elegances of Latinity and a kind of sentimental mysticism. The Abbé Lantaigne, the Superior of the High Seminary, fears lest he is training in this child a mighty enemy of the Church. He beholds in him another Renan. And so he dismisses him from the Seminary without a word of explanation. Firmin Piédagnel was at first overcome with amazement. Then he revolted. "And suddenly a feeling was born and grew within him, a feeling that sustained and fortified him, a hatred of priests, an undying and fertile hatred, a hatred to fill a lifetime."

Anatole France would have liked to take up this character again, to develop it, to write a novel round this gentle and delicate-souled Piédagnel who, in some ways, so closely resembled himself.

He himself had already employed this not uncommon method, whereby an author takes a passage, a story out of one of his own books as the starting-point of another novel. *A Mummers' Tale* is an expansion of a short

story called *Chevalier* after the name of the hero. And *Thaïs* had an almost identical origin. Anatole France used to relate that he had roughed out the story of Thaïs in a fantasy on Lebiez and Barré, the murderers. They displayed, even when they mounted the guillotine, a demeanour of such moving piety that the priest who was there to assist them was filled with wonder. Doubtless they would go and sit at the Lord's right hand, whilst their victim, having died without the Sacraments, would be consumed by hell-fire. Similarly the courtezan, Thaïs, purified by the monk Paphnutius, would go to Paradise, while Paphnutius himself, who had lost his soul for her sake, would groan in everlasting torment.

A SEQUEL TO "THE REVOLT OF THE ANGELS"

A simple note on a sheet of paper, which was used in the first place for a rough draft of the Dialogue on the Existence of God, read as follows:

"The Sequel to the Revolt of the Angels.
"What befalls the Angels during the war.
"Their reflections.
"The sorrows of Satan.
"The triumph of Michael."

MONSIEUR GAULARD

This sketch is jotted down on the back of a map of Poland (Warsaw, 1920). Though it seems to form no part of any projected work, it belongs to the series of satirical portraits of learned professors which enliven the pages of *Pierre Nozière*, *Little Pierre*, and *The Bloom of Life*.

"Monsieur Gaulard afforded me this spectacle for the thousand and first time. He was an imbecile, but of a rare species. We do not do justice to our imbeciles. They are always astonishing us. Their diversity is amazing. Nature has created innumerable varieties of them. Her resources, in this kind of task, are inexhaustible, whereas she gets out of breath at once

when she creates a man of intelligence. Monsieur Gaulard, a patron of letters, never understood a line of what he read."

" 'It's abstract,' he would suddenly remark, breaking off in his reading. His jaw would drop and he would cease to think. For he only thought with his mouth shut."

"He was tall, thin and booby-faced. His enormous mouth housed an enormous tongue which filled it up entirely. And when his mouth opened his tongue would ease itself by passing through the open door. His visage, which inclined to sadness, took on an expression of profound gloom whenever in desperation he ejaculated, 'It's abstract!' "

"He had read much, and chiefly admired Bossuet and Victor Cousin. He would have been happy, if he had not finally come to the conclusion, regarding the teaching of those two great authors, that 'it was abstract.' "

"What was the significance that he attached to that term 'abstract,' which marked

the farthest limit of his cogitations? It seems very probable that the word, for him, meant 'difficult to grasp, impossible to understand.' "

CHAPTER XII

CONCLUSION

ANATOLE FRANCE has often been represented as a sceptic, a dilettante, a mere "player on the flute." All the facts with which I have illustrated these final pages, however, demonstrate the firmness and continuity of his convictions. I could therefore hardly conclude my task more fittingly than by protesting with all my heart against these depreciatory judgments.

The "hideous smile," which Musset plastered on Voltaire's features, conceals his real countenance which Houdon has transmitted to us, so eloquent of kindly and indulgent wit. We must not permit the grave and pensive visage of Anatole France, of which Bourdelle has chiselled the truth-

ful symbol, to be distorted by mendacious legends.

All the people who would make Anatole France an utter sceptic are endeavouring, with more or less consciousness of purpose, to belittle and destroy a force with which they find themselves in opposition. They have discovered that the surest way to get the better of an adversary is to pooh-pooh him. It may be added that the majority of these opponents of his have obviously omitted to read him.

But, first of all, what is a sceptic? Most misunderstandings arise from a failure to agree upon definitions. A sceptic, in the ordinary sense of the word, is a man who affects to doubt all things and especially accepted beliefs. And it is certainly true that Anatole France did doubt a great many accepted beliefs. But, strange to relate, all the beliefs against which he couched his lance, favoured the strong, and deceived the weak; they all dealt tenderly with the privileged classes, while to the lowly they

preached the beauty of sacrifice and resignation, so as to keep them in a state of miserable ignorance. As such institutions are unhappily very numerous, people generalized rashly and said that he combated *all* institutions. They said that he mocked at everything. In point of fact, he only mocked at injustice.

Before I proceed, I must here remind my readers that his life was in complete harmony with his writings. For nearly thirty years, at every period of crisis, he took sides and threw himself into the thick of the fight. During all that long while, he never wearied in defending those who shared his views and were persecuted for their opinions. And all who were brought into personal contact with him know that his kindness did not end there, but that it was exhibited in all manner of ingenious attentions, for he could not resist the pleasure of giving pleasure. No, he certainly did not look like a sceptic, this wonderful old man, who up to the very last took so passionate an interest in public af-

fairs, who eagerly plied with questions every visitor at la Béchellerie, came he from Tours or from Paris, and always greeted him with an impatient, "Well, what's the news?" and whose generous solicitude for others made him completely oblivious of himself.

No; Anatole France did not deny everything and mock at everything. He was not content merely to demolish. An indulgent, humane philosophy exhales from all his writings. In *The Garden of Epicurus* he had set down its crowning precept, "Let us give unto men for witnesses and judges, Irony and Pity." And, twenty years later, he recalled it again in *The Gods are Athirst:* "Men are not sufficiently perfect to exercise justice in the name of virtue: the rule of life should be indulgence and kindness of heart."

Thousands upon thousands of people, in every quarter of the globe, have heard of, and delighted in, this smiling philosophy. This kindly genius was understood by all men of good will. And the best answer to

all who allege that in Anatole France they behold the complete sceptic, is the fervent gratitude evinced by all those people to whom his books have brought light, solace and enchantment.

We wish it were possible to quote all the messages, which not only on important dates, but on ordinary unmemorable days, brought him tributes of gratitude and veneration. For his followers, he was guide, confessor, and prophet, this so-called sceptic! A woman, who was quite a stranger to him and who was about to undergo a serious operation, wrote and asked him to take charge of her secret papers. Mothers would write and ask him to advise their sons in the choice of a career. A student once wrote to tell him that he had saved him from despair, from suicide. But it is vain to attempt to pick out a voice here and there in this innumerable concert: they are all in harmony. "You have made me understand life. . . . You have taught me the meaning of life. . . . To me you have been a sheer enchant-

ment. . . . You have given me the bread of the spirit. . . ." All sing the same praises, all give utterance to the same gratitude.

No; Anatole France did not simply destroy. He built up, too. But he did not build on the pattern of the past. He built in the future. That is what some people will not forgive him. On the occasion of his eightieth birthday, at the Trocadéro, two actors recited the dialogue from *Monsieur Bergeret in Paris*, in which the professor explains to his daughter what is his idea of better times. And even for such as had read, and reread, these pages, the words stood out into strong relief, took on a new value, a fresh significance. All who were present will bear me out. We witnessed the miracle of the fable that tells how the walls of Thebes rose up to the strains of Amphion's lyre, for to the music of that harmonious voice rose up the outlines of the City of the Future.

Some of Anatole France's detractors were

not content with questioning his influence and his convictions. They denied his talent. People have said to me, "What is the good of talking about all the discussions and pamphlets that poured out in torrents as soon as he was dead? They will have been long forgotten, when Anatole France himself is still being read with undiminished zest." That is evident. Moreover, it is probable that his writings, which contemplate and reflect the future, will be better and better understood in times to come. Time will add to their brilliance, time will reveal their riches and their depths to an ever-widening circle of disciples. The only answer to those who would decry the greatness of his achievement is that achievement itself. To belaud it would be as presumptuous as to belittle it. My sole intention here is to enter my protest against the unseemly tone of some of these attacks. Later generations must know the unparalleled violence, the frenzied impatience, the ungovernable rage, the savage hatred and

envy, the mad injustice and mean cowardice with which the writings and the memory of Anatole France were assailed as soon as he had breathed his last.

One might have hoped that an elementary sense of decency and respect for the dead would have ensured an interval of inviolable silence. We speak in whispers in the chamber of death; we bare our heads at the sight of a bier; we are moved by compassion for the sorrow of the mourners. These are instincts which even the coarsest souls obey. Not so the adversaries of Anatole France. For many and many a day, nay, in some cases, for years, they had been lying in wait, biding their time, and then when the hour struck, they rushed in on the heels of Death itself, striking at the same moment, ravening over their joint victim.

The majority of these people were actuated by political prejudice. They were unmannerly, but they were sincere. So blinded were they by fanatical frenzy that they placed themselves in this paradoxical posi-

tion: belonging to a party which makes a god of patriotism and which dearly loves to boast of having a monopoly of it, they nevertheless proceeded to do their best to dim the glory of a writer who, by the quality of his genius, imparted an added lustre to the glory of France throughout the world.

No doubt some of these doughty paladins availed themselves of the double opportunity of venting their indignation and advancing their interests. You cannot insult and defame a man whose passing calls forth the panegyrics of the entire world, without creating a stir and causing a little comment. You cannot go about saying it's night when it's day, without exciting some sort of remark. And who, in these pushful days, would let slip an opportunity for self-advertisement?

Some of these censors, in their eagerness to draw attention to themselves, displayed their righteous severity in so gross and flaunting a manner, and with such unblush-

ing impudence, as to render rebuke unnecessary and indignation beside the mark. It was like the entrance of the clowns, leering and irresistibly comic. For an instant, the very naïveté of their infamy brought a smile to faces that were wet with tears.

By besmirching the great achievement of Anatole France, by razing it out from the minds of men, there were other advantages to be reaped. What a diploma of rare distinction one gained thereby! Think what a pastmaster a man would have to be in the art of writing to be able to find fault with the writing of Anatole France! To affect to depreciate a great reputation is one way of manufacturing a paltry reputation for one's self. One can win a sort of cheap originality by denying the quality of originality to others. What a mutual admiration society these heroic gentlemen make up. One of them will gravely remark, "It appears that So-and-So is fearfully difficult." That is almost the same as saying, "He's a wonderfully clever fellow."

Emulation spurred them on; each one was anxious to outdo his fellows in the virulence and wildness of his judgment. We all know how every one of these superior people tried to go one better than the rest; until at last Anatole France was relegated by them to a sort of philosophical kindergarten.

And then that essentially human failing "conceit" came into the business. To say that Anatole France was not a back-number was tantamount to confessing that you were a back-number yourself. It became the unholy fashion, the height of "good form," to depreciate and often, alas! to throw him over. There were writers who, when Anatole France was alive, showered their books upon him, fine paper editions adorned with the most obsequious inscriptions, and who, when he was dead, judged him with the most pontifical severity.

Ah, how many of them will reverse their verdicts in years to come and live to blush at their base poltroonery! That will be their punishment—to be confronted with

themselves. But madness sat in triumph on her throne. And losing not a single moment, without shame, without pity for those who had been dear to him, without respect for the most sacred obligations, the whole crowd of fanatics and place-hunters swooped down like so many vultures on the old man's memory and began that task for which there is no word, for which no language can find a name.

Certain members of this ghoulish brood belonged to a particularly repulsive *genus*. They were those whom Anatole France had taken into his confidence and made much of; and who betrayed both his friendship and his trust by publishing a grotesque and shamelessly distorted picture of him.

There are no limits to what a writer may divulge. Diderot's daughter wrote her father's life without concealing any part of it, neither his costly whims nor his protracted liaison with Mademoiselle Volland, not even her mother's tears. But with her, filial respect and truth went hand in hand. Her

fervent love gave her the tact and delicacy that she needed in order to say all and yet hurt the feelings of nobody. She proved that one may narrate the whole story of a great man's life without giving offence to his memory, or to his friends, without transgressing the rules of good taste or sinning against the truth.

I am not going to dwell upon their books, all of which are mingled, in my memory, in one welter of profound disgust. Nor will I harp on the many painful and sacrilegious indiscretions of the "peepers and botanizers," who respected no sorrow and revered no sanctity, who repeated all the contemptible gossip that they could drink in, in little shop parlours where mean and insatiable jealousies prey on filth and garbage, where lies abound and multiply and go on flourishing, till one day, when they least expect, they get their quietus.

Meanwhile, on this point I must insist; the picture they paint of Anatole France is an odious distortion. As I have said before,

he liked to look at things in every aspect. His ideas would circle about and come back upon their traces; they turned and eddied like the water of a river before they finally begin their journey to the sea. Relying on the good faith of his guests, he always spoke freely what was in his mind, he paid them the compliment of thinking aloud in their presence. But some of his hearers were evil-hearted and betrayed him. Some, from mere stupidity, others from malevolence, have often only given the eddies, the backwash of his talk. If, for example, he was giving full play to his fancy, these listeners, instead of reporting the whole of his discourse in all its divagations, would only give as much of it as suited their particular purpose. Or else they would quote the humorous exaggerations, the antitheses, in order to show how he distorted the truth in his efforts to be dazzling. Supposing he was painting one of those familiar portraits in which he was always wont to put a deal of light and shade, they would only reveal the shade.

And so what a number of people they have thus wantonly wounded. Men, who looked on Anatole France's friendship as the pride of their lives, would take it, from these garbled statements, that Anatole France had cast a slur upon their character. It was a cruel thing thus to besmirch the image of him that they bore enshrined within their hearts. Nothing, perhaps, brings out into stronger relief the wantonness, the iniquitous spite of these venomous busy-bodies.

Must I further recall that these sorry creatures thought fit to scoff at Anatole France even when they were enjoying the benefits which he had bestowed upon them? Did they not dare to flout and jeer at people whom he had loved and whose memory, because of the love he had borne them, should have been secure from insult now that they are in the grave; and not only these, but other defenceless ones who are still alive or live on in their descendants?

What was it that compelled these people to act as they did? The spy, the

scavenger, the emptier of cesspools, the sewerman perform their disagreeable office to earn their daily bread. But these people had not that excuse. They were gaining their living before they began their foul work. Are they indeed the special products of this bitter age, this heartless epoch, this era of hysterical self-advertisement born of the war, when people have retained, or acquired, the habit of hacking their way through to notoriety; where a man is bound to draw attention to himself, to get himself talked about at any price, to tickle the ears of the groundlings, to get his public round him, proclaiming either that he has been robbed, or that he's a robber?

It doesn't matter to them what people think of them so long as they buy their books. When some indignant critic administers to them a hearty kick in that part of their anatomy which is commonly associated with such intentions, they will cry ecstatically, "Lord, what a send-off!"

True the type is a new one, as also is the

age in which we live. History, legend, literature, the drama, have all given us stock examples of human deformity. The miser is Harpagon; the traitor, Judas; the jealous man, Othello; the hypocrite, Tartufe; Gribouille personifies foolishness; Nero, cruelty; Basile, slander; Messalina, lust. But the perfect, the typical example of the blackguard did not exist until now.

Truly it is a tremendous piece of irony that the war, the war which Anatole France so bitterly hated, should have loaded his memory with this missing link in the chain of monsters—the unadulterated cad.

But a voice whispers in my ear, "Well, but Anatole France would only have laughed at it." And that is true. He was the only man in the whole world who could have done so. And perhaps that is the most crushing rebuke that could overtake these miserable cowards, the smile of Anatole France.

THE END

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